Sulfur 14

- THE BOOK OF DURING BY CLARK COOLIDGE
- A NANCY SPERO FOLD-OUT
- POETRY BY ARKADII DRAGOMOSHCHENKO, BASIL BUNTING, GUSTAF SOBIN, AND BARBARA MORAFF
- RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS ON POETRY & GENDER
- MARJORIE PERLOFF ON DJUNA BARNES AND ADRIENNE RICH

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CONTENTS

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER: Basil Bunting 4

BASIL BUNTING: A Song For Rustam 7
An Open Letter To Louis Zukofsky 8

CLARK COOLIDGE: from The Book Of During 11

JEROME ROTHENBERG: Visions Of Jesus 22

LAURIE WEEKS: Seahorse 25

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS: Otherhow 27

DIANE GLANCY: Some Thoughts On Our Uncommon Language 39

LARRY EIGNER: Five Poems 42

GUSTAF SOBIN: A Portrait Of The Self As Instrument Of Its Syllables 45

JORGE PEREZ-ROMAN: Quid Novi 65
Six Artworks 68

VLADIMIR HOLAN: from A Night With Hamlet
[Tr. from the Czech by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan] 74

NANCY SPERO: El Salvador
Fold-out artwork, following page 80

GEORGE EVANS: A View From Space 81

Cover: Henri Michaux
Untitled / Watercolor on paper / 22" x 15" / 1970
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PAUL CHRISTENSEN: Two Poems 85

JOHN YAU: Michael Kessler's Drawings: Gesture as Image 88

MICHAEL KESSLER: Five Drawings 89

ELIOT WEINBERGER: Paper Tigers 94

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN: The Excavation of Artaud 105

SAUL YURKIEVICH: Four Poems [Tr. from the Spanish by Cola Franzen] 106

HONOR JOHNSON: You Place 110

BARBARA MORAFF: Five Poems 112

ARKADII DRAGOMOSHCHENKO: Five Poems [Tr. from the Russian by Lyn Hejinian and Michael Molnar] 116

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS: Perloff on Barnes and Rich; Letter from Larry Eigner; Rothenberg replies to Clifford; Letter from Laura (Riding) Jackson; Christensen on essays on Dorn; Schelling on Borges; Coolidge on Mulligan and Baker; Williamson on Ginsberg; Economou on Tarn; Mikhail Bakhtin's last words 132

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AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

BASIL BUNTING

The last of this century's great poets writing in English died Wednesday, April 17, 1985 in Hexham, England. Basil Bunting was 85 years old. The New York Times gave Mr. Bunting 120 words for his obituary, misspelling Hexham and mistaking the name of his American publisher, the space afforded Bunting being somewhat more than to the editor of Popular Mechanics and to the singer Ethel Waters' accompanist, while somewhat less than to the illustrator of Captain Marvel, the comic book hero, and about half as many words as to one Li Boxhao, dramatist and wife of a Chinese Politburo official.

Though more influenced by than influential as Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Williams, Basil Bunting wrote the finest long poem of the century, "Briggflatts" and a magnificent, condensed version of Kamo-No-Chomei's *Ho-Jo-Ki*, which he rendered, in turn, from an Italian translation of the medieval Japanese classic. These two poems, along with a dozen or so shorter, lyrical poems he called *odes*, and several handsome versions (what he called *overdrafts*) of Horace and the great Persians, Firdosi, Rudaki and Manuchehri, comprise a corpus that places Bunting among the finest lyric poets of the language.

In 1971-72 I had the great good fortune to study and spend time with Mr. Bunting at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, and with a few other students at his cottage several miles down the road by the water. He was already into his 70's, but apart from a nagging cigarette cough he was a hale, splendidly lucid man of understated but proud bearing. I recall two things—or two things come to mind—from that time: he usually had the Penguin translation of *Njal's Saga* in his coat pocket, and he could often be seen on a bench near the small place he rented looking out on the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

He wasn't a man comfortable in an academic setting, and he was treated abominably by the *creative writing* faculty, who were jealous of him as only provincial hacks can be of a distinguished outlander they can't fathom and who doesn't give a tinker's damn about them. The regular English faculty would try to chat him up for tasty anecdotes about Yeats, Pound, Eliot, etc., but they were sent away disappointed on every occasion. Mr. Bunting was always rather old-fashioned about telling tales outside of school. I rather suspect his *attitude* cost him along the road—in fact, it cost him dearly. But he did like young people, and Mr. Bunting tried to give us what he felt we were able to digest of the important

moderns, many of whom were friends. As teacher he instilled in his students the notion that poetry is the most rigorous of disciplines and has little to do with self-expression. Just as Picasso complained about there being too many artists and not enough painters, Mr. Bunting believed that the world was lousy with geniuses, *sensitive flowers* and great souls while short, very short, on men and women who knew how to write. He further warned us to take our material from life not books, as his generation – Pound, Eliot, Joyce, David Jones, Zukofsky, himself – did, encumbering their work with too much literary allusion and esoteric learning.

He liked to say there's no excuse for literary criticism – considerable though his regard for Kenneth Cox and Hugh Kenner was – and read to us: Yeats, H.D., Williams, Pound (*Homage to Sextus Propertius, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,* and hour upon hour, weeks on end, from *The Cantos*), Marianne Moore and Eliot; but also Lorine Niedecker, David Jones, Zukofsky, and Hugh MacDiarmid, the first experience of these writers for most of us. When he tired of reading, he played for us recordings of Dowland, Morley, Byrd and others so that we might hear all the rhythms possible in English, which he felt were contained in the Renaissance madrigal and compositions for lute. Mr. Bunting regarded himself as a minor poet ("not conspicuously dishonest") but a good one, whose work would hold up.

His poetry is, of course, better than that. I suspect he knew it. When I rudely – as a younger man is rude – asked him one day if it bugged him that he wasn't famous like Ted Hughes or Robert Lowell, he answered easily and with equanimity, "No, not really. My work will be read long after I'm gone."

Spenser, Wordsworth, and Pound were the writers in English Bunting valued most highly. *Briggflatts* is very much the flower of Pound's legacy, and in many regards the poem Pound never developed a human enough voice to achieve. The concentration of image and emotion, the strength and variety of tone and rhythm, the wedding of these elements, are like nothing else in the language. To hear him read the poem was overwhelming – as if no one else had tapped so rich a vein of word and music before. It's something you don't forget; and afterwards almost everything, especially one's own work, seems broken-backed and threadbare.

"It is time to consider," Bunting writes in *Briggflatts*, "how Domenico Scarlatti/ condensed so much music into so few bars/ with never a crabbed turn or congested cadence,/ never a boast or a see-here; . . ." It's time for a new generation of writers to get past the natter and posturings and to explore how a poet like Bunting was able to get so much poetry into so few lines, his line never faltering, his heart and eyes open to the world and its difficult beauty.

Basil Bunting was a wonderful man, quite apart from his poetry,

however diligently he tried to play the curmudgeon. He led a fascinating, eventful life, and not on other men's money as Byron did. The stories and praises will spring forth. We usually like our poets dead before honoring them.

The sheets are gathered and bound,
the volume indexed and shelved,
dust on its marbled leaves.

We'll not see his like again.

A SONG FOR RUSTAM

Tears are for what can be mended,
not for a voyage ended
the day the schooner put out.
Short fear and sudden quiet
too deep for a diving thief.
Tears are for easy grief.

My soil is shorn,
forests and corn.
Winter will bare the rock.
What has he left of pride
whose son is dead?
My soil has shaved its head.

The sky withers and stinks.
Star after star sinks
into the west, by you.
Whirling spokes of the wheel
hoist up a faded day,
its sky wrinkled and grey.

Words slung to the gale
stammer and fail:
"Unseen is not unknown,
unkissed is not unloved,
unheard is not unsung;"
Words late, lost, dumb.

Truth that shone is dim,
lies cripple every limb.
Where you were, you are not.
Silent, heavy air
stifles the heart's leap.
Truth is asleep.

7 : IX : 64

BASIL BUNTING

AN OPEN LETTER TO LOUIS ZUKOFSKY (1932)

Dear Louis,

Criticism, especially my own, is painful to me. Presumably the poet knows what he meant to do. The detection of fraud and adulteration is necessary policework, but must keep within the rules of evidence: fact, not hearsay; history, not speculation; all the exhibits there alongside their expert analysis.

There is a purpose in the showcase too; select samples with a sufficient but succinct and unobtrusive ticket, as in 'quality' shopwindows. I have very much admired your skill at that job.

But:

If I buy a hat I am content that it should fit, be impermeable, of good texture, and of colour and cut not outrageously out of fashion. If I am a hatmaker I seek instruction in a series of limited practical operations ending in the production of a good hat with the least possible waste of effort and expense. I NEVER want a philosophy of hats, a metaphysical idea of Hat in the abstract, nor in any case a great deal of talk about hats.

The uses of hats are few, definite and practical. Let a doctor call attention to them from time to time for the conversion of the Hatless Brigade, the rest of us will take them for granted.

This is what I would understand by Objectivism, if the word were mine. It seems to me that one passage in your admirable 'Recencies' essay in the Objectivist anthology oversteps the limits of useful criticism.

For the reader, an expert's certificate of precision, concision and general good workmanship; or a warning of their absence. For the state, now and then, a reiteration of the known, definite, limited, practical necessity of poetry. For the poet, technical information as from one good craftsman to another; such as doctors exchange in the medical papers.

For this last, Pound's three items quoted by you are a model (Direct treatment: to use no word that does not contribute to the presentation: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome) His well-known Dont's' are as explicit and concrete.

Johnson understood the value of minute explanation: there is more to be learned from his Notes on Shakespeare and the critical parts of Lives of the Poets than from almost all the rest of English criticism put together. You have yourself used a similar method both in public and privately cor-

recting my poems, and it has been valuable. Your version of Rexroth's Prolegomena, compared with his original, is likewise instructive. I think this is what criticism should be.

But these definitions of A Poem! You are not content to swab up Eliot's mess.

We have a pretty good working notion of a poem. Its marks? They can be recorded in a purely scientific spirit. A naturalist can define a tiger, but his definition fits a wretched, mangy, undergrown, pitiful specimen as well as a Blakean super-tyger. He counts its teeth and vertebrae, measures its skull, observes the structure and disposition of its organs. He does not mention ferocity, barely strength; nothing we un-experts commonly associate with tigers.

I distrust your page 15. 'A poem. . . . perfect rest. . . . the desire for what is objectively perfect. . . . the desire for inclusiveness. . . .' (I select what I like least). There is discrimination; but whether the things discriminated between have any bearing on poetry I doubt. If they have, it is remote.

The aspirations of the hatmaker can only faintly affect the hat. The psychology of the poet is not the critic's business. Psychology has become as insidious a nuisance to our age as ethics was to the last or theology to an older one. People are constantly committing psychology without knowing it. I have nothing against psychology in its proper orbit (restricted); nor against ethics, nor theology.

The value of Pound's preaching of Confucius does not lie in Confucius, whose wisdom seems to me to be mixed with the usual quantity of bunk, some of it quite as unpleasant as anything in St. Paul: but in the fact that Pound has not isolated a set of precepts, but developed a pervading stress on the immediate, the particular, the concrete; distrust of abstractions; shrinking from even the suspicion of verbalism; from the puns and polyvalencies in which mystics delight. It is not unspeculative but sceptical. It will build with facts, but declines to soar with inevitably unsteady words. All this is as important to criticism (or any other department of knowledge or action) as it is to poetry.

I have always supposed you to have a greater care for facts than almost any critic now living; a greater partiality for the particular, for the 'very words'. But these paragraphs about poetry look to me like flights into darkness, away from ascertained and reascertainable fact to speculative mysticism, to a region I think void of anything permanently valuable.

The mystic purchases a moment of exhilaration with a lifetime of confusion; and the exhilaration is incommunicable but the confusion infectious and destructive. It is confusing and destructive to try and explain anything in terms of anything else, poetry in terms of psychology. And in fact the inclusion of Rexroth's vast vagueness in your anthology is, I

think, traceable to the importation of an extraneous standard into your judgement of poetry.

I have no alternative *principle*. I do not think anything can be simplified. We can only be content to begin at the beginning and to remain very near the beginning all our lifetime.

We cannot afford to let a subtle monism obscure the lucidity you have often brought to bear on specific poems, as in your study of the 'Cantos'. A movement, a religion, is no substitute for clearsight, even if it be a much better religion than those recently current amongst writers.

Criticism is to poetry what anatomy, histology, physiology are to the living body. You quote Pound's triple distinction: melopoeia, phanopoeia, logopoeia: a contribution to the science. Criticism is concerned with what is written, not with the mind of the writer, as anatomy with man's body, not with the unguessable intentions of an unlikely Creator.

BASIL BUNTING

Note

"A Song for Rustam" was written after the death of the poet's son. Although Bunting circulated the poem privately, he did not wish it to be published in his lifetime. "An Open Letter to Louis Zukofsky" was intended for publication, in Italian translation, in the magazine *Il Mare*. It is unclear whether it actually appeared. It is not listed in Roger Guedalla's bibliography, which includes other pieces Bunting wrote for the magazine. It has never been published in English.

—E.W.

CLARK COOLIDGE

from THE BOOK OF DURING

Hell, I don't know anything but I'll begin. I stain these pages.

Nothing could come from it and yet something did. I could do the work, from where?, and have it go completely inside. Nothing more to think of it. It would exist but I could never touch it again. I had made it. I had gone beyond my inside and forgotten it. There it stands. And sometimes still I am among the formerly mine, find myself there adrift and obscure. Turning and turning from these pages.

Enough that I would put the work outside, an object I could then want to fuck? What is a "beautiful" sentence? A sentence that is an object of desire. Ridiculous enough to be going on with, or just a masturbation of misspellings? A lob book? By all the writing done, what have I been inoculated against? Push. Still push.

I remember people coming into rooms and doing precise things but I don't recall who those people are.

Somebody punched the door behind me. I backed up. I should have turned around to see, maybe to open, but I didn't, I couldn't. I could only back up some more. Fianlly my back was against the wood of the door and I could feel the blows.

Ceilings. Use mirrors for ceilings. Wait on the floors. Just step, forget.

The rice was original. Few things are, prove to have been, to be. Nobody collects them.

Wars continued. Nobody hated each other. It was economic, they said. People dead, were killed to die. Hatreds produced fewer killings than you might think. Thought itself produced more. War is thought arguing among itself. War as unshielded synapses.

Fingers on the windows all the night. Fingers of insects.

The war of the dreaming helplessness with cobwebs attached milky to the stems of cards and washed flesh after sex. The world opened up into a single slightly transparent stone. Recite nine numbers to get beyond my block. Rinse off your toast in the leakings of a ballpoint. Show the sun a picture.

People don't know anything. They smell. They sight things. They worry at traces and unravel and toy with musical blame and unlock the pigeons and ratty sparrows on dream time. Inside the house, the housing of everyone, a single small clock in the shape of a pinkish cathedral with felt-muffled bells. I was dreaming of a place where all the moons could arrive in perfect silence.

Knowledge is absolutely to be blamed for: (list all your finest attributes).

A mock terrier, or man with a mask, asked me. He wanted to know where but I told him when. A brawl. Two wrists locked together, the other hands snapping their fingers and flinging at everyone and elsewhere. Time for everything. Time for the Collision of Masks.

He wanted to stay with me and fuck me but I wouldn't let him so he drilled a neat hole in the medicine cabinet mirror and left.

Nine degrees below zero inside the radio and at all times.

I live on next to nothing these days. Tapes and tales. Masturbation even impossible in a position of ignorance. I smile like a sailor. I hover over only rounded glasses, straight edges would ground me. I laugh when everyone around me goes silent. The words to the song erased themselves in its singing.

She is a maker of baffles and she comes to see me. We just glow in each other's and don't speak. Nothing touches. Everything else rings. She try on a sailor suit, and I to pass through unseen.

Novels don't suit me. I read them endlessly, shaking the droplets from me as a dog.

Night, and life, have their alibis, but me I just stick to my story.

Who, at all certainly, keeps a name anymore?

I realize I can use any name here and be someone for a length. I can rip through the world snorting with conjunction. I don't even have to learn to spell or control finger cramps. I can live on dust in the air and live on. No collars of steel on the hands of dream. I think I am someone, perhaps a shy coal worker, and quick I am that one but not tied to him long, if I wish. If I wish I can assume disconnect identities and leap limitlessly. No one tells me, nothing halts me. I can even combine.

I am her? One day, one moment, microseconds, I *am* her? I look down.

The world waits on a small black notebook. The world waits on nothing. I hurry to write it down and step back. I step back quickly and write it there. I have nothing but time, to lose. I am loose in the hum of these circuits, these meals between drills. I have to step to no pace. Everything is suddenly in time. No matter. Nothing to help or waste. Nothing but thighs for a moment, a chain of moments, *those* thighs. This world will not wait for a sunrise, or a melodic beckoning.

I have become the king and waste time happily on needless rings. I take up time with hapless rhymes. They extend one moment the same. They haul all sames to me. I blow a mist in all the mirrors and there have to be many in Rinseless Palace. I rise at dawn after no sleep in my rocker bed and arrange the circuits of my chimes. All belongs to me, with no knowledge and little ability. I save things that I will later tire of and throw without a care away. There are nine suits within the one suit. Models of

more modernistic drawers hidden in the drawer. Plans for extreme sex. Sex with stitches, sex with hardware, sex in pursuit and in hiding and in the lap of the gods, the laughs of my peers. I have no peers. I preen. I gum up. I throw out my knee. Piss on dates. Accompany rotarians to the abattoir. I hide a model aeroplane in my pill closet, a checker in my vest. All the things I might ever need are mine at a glance, a balloon for the gladdening. Show me your house, your glass hobby, your ripened sex, all mine. The ribbons in your dresser, mine. The warts on your cock, also mine. Abacus of variations and trends of ass wind, mine. Everything possible to pleasuring bodies, in useless work and in measured heat, all mine. This be the Kingdom of the Sole Encompasser.

Perfectly still she gets me hotter. Why marble is sexier than all the dancers. Flesh a matter strict of polarity.

A says she wants to fuck me, but she doesn't want to fuck. A says she doesn't want, but I know she secretly wants me to fuck. Someone. Other. The ones who race past me, on the way to singular slum agleam. God knows what's happening at the lake.

The rotarians devised papers, that's all for all time, just sheets. White areas of darkness, nothing intelligible there. No fucking on saturdays, wednesdays, only sundays, the movie lasted a year and I was pissed. She sang and didn't remove it, her clothes were hot but not attractive. She could have shucked them, but he didn't want me to. He was rotarian. He liked all things at once.

It was late in the night and no one moved on the street. Lights like small suns with rings. The sound, close but tinkly like far away, bothered me. I walked down by the shore, erasure, constant, no one leaves me alone, I have to take erasure. Winning is beyond this planet. The other suns . . .

I don't remember then to describe the "real" people. I do remember the ones from books already described. The honestly fitted together. The dark ones with asthma. The grey one with helplessly open valve. The animals flood over the streets in patches. Excited world of nothing human. Pale pall world of slight trembles, overly sensitive needles. I couldn't choose though, I couldn't run or stay. The way the emerald fitted its clamp and just squared away, and just rose there.

He just wanted me to tell him something so he reached inside my blouse. That hot afternoon I had felt overly rouged, sauced to the nipples by stick tipped with red. All language had passed between the smoking lamps. On deck piles of paraplegic paraphernalia. The red-legged spider descended. Its cry shot past me. The all-over hotness was a matter of my body leaning at his in curving and rhymes. Insect hit the floor, running.

They want to fuck everybody so they learn to go to school. No warning, just arrive. Compete with teaching with penis and vagina, call it cock and cunt. Shout it in the hallways, paint it inside *all* the lockers along one wall. Meat moves in the boiler room. Folded spitball notes whole

detailed novels pornographic with real names and even crude pictures. Everyone is insulted into bald driven heat. Take my short arm, señor. Ram it in by the clipboard pound. Cocks harnessed in rows of notebinder rings. Negative cunt form molds of Federal Lunch. We reorganize the whole curriculum into a bloody stew. Feedback of meats. Chopped and channeled exquisites. Art of the come-stain on my cardboard pants.

We machinegunned everyone who passed a certain barrier. And we keep track of the rolls of the dead in mammoth fresco behind the clambake works. It all goes fine, make them everyone go away. Line of reds across the chest. He goes down. She pleads for the one last shot. I turn to spit and giggle my trigger closed.

Johnny Carson combines with Marcus Belgrave to tie up the lunchmeat market. They use ten-foot aluminum cylinders labeled "Twinkletoes." No one is funny then. Everyone laughs. Ten winos drag the tubes, empty or closed, down Fleet Street for no reason. Heads clot the brittle barriers and casements in a bright barium flare nights. Captain Midnight is rued to be long dead. Long live the Cap in his secrecy tricky wends. Long life to the long dead.

I saw cock rhyme cunt in its outward plunge. I saw the shuttle clear in the center of each dream. My cock rose going to the sunny awning store. Cunts of doctors drenched the parquet. The MeatWheel spun, outward in all avenues the shriek of the inward cam. The knowledge was deafening. I wrote my new poems on sailors passed in Ditch of Spume. The all-out war for the language started coming up the Hole.

In Foster Grant Avenue tarpaper lynchmobs. Three fights per lit match. Grace Glancer mocked on by thrilling in brine-pink shoes. She pursued a glamour no one could trace, the fame of onion burn heaven a valve left on in your gut. She finally took three rooms over the Saddle Stationary. Mobs looked up. Nothing but grass turning black in her single pane.

Bung waits on quiff. Quim. Intolerable awaitings clogged and darling. I lift a snifter, a drain of rust and brine cogs rinsed and scarlet schist and echos shined to a shot. Blameless scruples tongued the inside, tongues in brine, ruby encapsulements logged into compartments whistling along the bledways. We were enteamed in a jet starling of wheated blurts. We didn't know the whichways. Hot out war fanged carbonside. Where are we going? And who collides the marvels to treat it? Tongues char the whist of clit sentences. Everyone's blurt a single. Then we see the WhatAss clear the spongerange, his whole hotness immaculate and draining in strainpipes of Shostakovich. And the placemat soakings continue at a fuck.

I slobber out all over my hover jellies. Everyone knows me and they wait on my smile. Fame in a windward loco away. Pass the farm smells, pass the belly. Rhyme with gardens the joke of your tits. Eat marl and scope of ant atoppage. Blame realms emit. Red lit cabbages at the bevel

of the cart bar. You have sucked me into my own stains, my star barn turns. Heave on back the lobbage jelly, turn up bluestar to shovage level. I take out Mars Bars on an insect date. It smarts and cools derms. Stop eating off my face and reading. Chart juice all over the warm dials. This missage picture will land. These carping bell boils, these harmages. Picture of a boy pouring onyx over his tips.

Lights to failure urge. That or the greatest greenstop in Texas. Where they hire out for flame lessons and bunion carbonation. Whole whales of cheatmobs stabbing down dust rows in cleat sets and delve pants. They smile. And in that group smile is a weight. Will calm down on you, thirty tons of shirtwaist embalming tongs. Rattle of belts and cogs and shears. Run for your dimes and call on out of here. Don't await the shadows of the short star. When the girl wants to fuck whole combines short as a sneak cabbie. And the bees snort.

People have opinions and wait around the radios. Never sing and nothing means. They hold their opinions out in front of chests like paper waffles. A month of sundays compressed into a sunday moment without the bar spins by their noses. The population all about not to pass out but wheat out, paste out, scowl all noteless out. They don't do anything they might at least listen for. They drill pale brain and avoid the surly dentists. As the town boards sing to themselves the one note the river gives.

I went back home to bed and dreamed about bed dramatics. Girl jacking off with the one special toe. Epoxy as lubrication for that terminal fuck. Episodes with joke teeth, surprising chittery cunts you can't make time or lap with. He's come over and won't go and she won't stay still. Leave me but first blow my body all of it whole to the wall. Use the coily strappages and certain platyhelminthe techniques. As you come divide so I'll wake to have more. Stop up my ear wells in penal servitude. Get off on icebox remnants. Stop my screams with a quail. These are the stories I fed off in my bed, my long bed of the call of the row of vivid rapid short events.

Shortages became needed and all the fucks more silent. Shapeless trendencies, brown as a worm. Godawful ox horn went off instead of the summer siren. She called me, then went off without me. Are we standing for the sole onan event, like on an earth of single stamens? I don't like to call this Bad but I am forced to shout. Calling all lice-happy chorusters! Chime in once you see the shovel at the end of slime-band balance. And keep close nates. Chalk dust dries their parts in these films. Choking the jade oxen with clams of steel.

I'm obliged to leave and you know why. You understand me and therefore you stand for everything I do, anything. Even my tromping out of this room without an explanation, a reason, a bulk pass, peremptory trauma. You will be left. Then I will stay outside. Masturbation. The film between two separate but adjacent wars. The terrors see each other always.

Transparent walls smeared. Everybody gangs up and screams nobody on the otherside hears. You lie back on the sheets, the rubber beneath, and raise one leg, "languidly," it means a flow of milky potage down to where your stocking rim takes it. Your cunt shivers slightly as the flashlight touches one corner of its focused beam, opens to show. You are on stage and blush, blame is rising in all the stems. Your throat strains to keep in line with desire. The other side. The filmy side of the trench we other beings build, and fudge.

The rate of hearing collapses inward. Sounds like a million snails fucking on a dime. Zazzing insects fort up their own razor concertos. Sense only compacts. Three zero clams pop the tire's outward bulge. As I'm showing you a trumpet, naked, we meet in a glare of wide oxide perfumes, a solo pressed to micro-parts float on air. We smell an act. No need to listen or moving listen. A fuck the size of a tick.

Desire ratios. How many minutes of bounce on the slab, very cold whiteness, do you want me? How many times slight reveal of an armpit? Dare to sneeze up your opening how many times? Show the nipple then recover, how much? Press eyeballs inward through lids at gain of orgasm, how hard? Phosphor embroidery flotilla? Up against the brain walls ticking inroads of slap of cunt, lips against stomach, rod against hairs, how many, what frequency? How many times have you said to me "I want you to take me," breath gaining pitch on a rise? And how many breaths not know where the other hand is?

You disturb me a lot so I shot you away from me. You disturb me so much I clammed up forever. I talked so much I even talked to you. Told you while we're fucking the length of every lesser-known avenue in the city. Have told you and told you and now you say you remember nothing. Where is your head? And where will you open next? That I come out of you beyond you where?

Bending in sure indulgence, shorter than everyone. He asks me over and over but I still can't remember Johnny Carson though nightly I loosen my cunt to the tube. See up me, absent friends. Then sear about a flesh dot and see about me. They curl in this city, when they're not wrecking their plumage on the steely girls. Woman exposed to cathode nightly, why are my eyes supposed to redden their rims at thought of that? Fingering in bedded indulgence, sighs calming the pressure to stow meat. I'm smaller than anyone, even that grey-cropped bark down in the nozzle of the light. Dreams of the Cylinder too, I roll in place.

A crystal ball high up between the thighs. Sheddings of the future, juicings down on any possible sphere. You, world, come to me, anyway as I would come on you. Displacement mode, quivering mineral between quakes. I shout you and leak. Thin covering iridescent vivid in breath of lightning. Breathing you down into scads of small disaster, I would be a shot hawk and furl. The time between spasms coming briefer, world

to crack? Stem these feelings.

She says, Hand me the petering lamp. About to scowl and with one hand at the hem of her drawers. I think, It's all in her mind to burn. Which portion of flesh, which thought? I say Hello to her, again. The wrist watch around the middle of her thigh is reddening off the circulation. Something will have to dawn and soon. I don't give it to her and she takes it anyway, leans over and takes it off the round slate table to my right. A nipple dangles I grab and pinch, hold in vice till she smiles, her eyes going out. See the pretty flowers, lady? It's not going to be easy. She brings the lamp down in a line of oily fume and sets her pants alight at the crotch. Blooms that the mind never deals.

I see the world now, more than two lines of extremity. Not even lines, not even points. Hash browns growing scarlet. She was saucy with me. I groped my way to the wall, soft brown fedoras hanging on it, more than three. I'm not being cute. I can count, in usual circumstances. This was no night to be out of line. She was playing hard to see, constant batty motion, curves like a Greek, thoughtless candles spraying, lips that would loom parasitical, crawly knees. Things never seem quite brutal to you do they?, she shouted and went for it. Hot metal like the newest of hair coverings they could have come up with. Sounded like a frustrated army on the radio. They say you can always get away with words.

Old paint grumping up. Men looking to the corners. No one would drill to the quick of the artist's intention, his swerve from what(?) with still quick eyes. No need to rehearse it. The works are all escapes.

The granite steps in front of the man's name way high up and the carved recitation of his many deeds, what do *they* mean? And that one standing over behind the rose beds with the pencil in his hair, what are we to make of? And the many movies of all sorts of people talking to each other about anything both before and after opening and closing countless doors, how explain? It's necessary, that's all, they said and began adjusting their clothes. Then some of them were seen to run away, but the worst of them stayed.

If I were to say something, who knows what I would mean?

Constipation leads to dwelling. Came back later and found it still here. Breasts over the ear drums, a spine for the inflation. I stood up, couldn't find myself thinking of anything. Wanted to walk back bright but stood stock. Caught hard in a glare, lemon in the window lighting the yard. I blew horn, thought out my bedroom layout later, man. Store of tongues, laps lapping each other. Left the block of my thought years ago and collide with everything else since on a yearn, a pile of papers juiced. You hand me within a hotness, great ridge repeating the hang of walls. Store nothing but the beat of the cheeks. You come round that wall and see me now.

The panic is on. Man running down the street and caught himself.

Beyond that was nothing but whatever, Block of Business. She tendons her blood out through into heat lamp visions, mats of black above your lying head. I don't know you. I only get to side-saddle you. You blow my sneers. Caught up with her own sneakers. My head is caught. The cat ran under her cap, my head beneath her settles. You'll have to sneak eyes back under and leave it all there. We'll have to match. Play the black silence back, snort to hip and even teething furthers. Came, as I start to catch up. Play cunt, realm of interior haze peacock on the music's needles. His spikes in the loam, her tits in the open bowl. Handsome as a scrape, one ear holds, muffs. Then I get down to the back of the music beyond the cellar. Inflation time of sticking close together.

I see you in flakes, fade. Dimple, your treatment of socks, blouse, innards. Spiders all rise when you sit. You seem no length that I can divide. I'd have to erase more than half. Suck my flams. Commit to abutted futures, sporing lamps engulfed overland. The gas had gone out when you come to tickle. Resist, refog. This is not as abstract you can't follow it. Simpler it would bean you and drive the spiders. Beyond wheat, beyond residues of the blank page, blind desire. I would have to hate everyone to truly come back home. Hate clench crotch to rear shine knots. Impossible to climb out of this room. Room where fuck so much is common enough to spin no deed. And he had deeded her, and her head was bright not dead.

Great malicious pauses to the palm on the thigh. Scream these notes.

Height in the morning? I cannot reach to stand it. Blinded vertical encapsulations of the crawl. Say something to me that hasn't blue in it. Anything I can't say, rotate your thighs. The day the wrist becomes novel. Explosion come from over behind you out the window in the morning. Ponder fucking shadows on meeting venetian blinds. Have I another name in the dark? Pronounceable, if barely, length: over an hour. And even raising one arm as I say, Flames are mortal. Fuck the trees. Height is always frontal.

Always frontal, material, face.

Grandview Highway opens and there are pyro-beings fucking there too in front of the grating billboards. Guy with an acid cut. Polyurethane crucifixion humming away, and the price of slack is felt. Do you sense the gun odor? Population grim and smartly. We watch, then we dip, you and I, in a saucier bulge of the cut strip tarp. Having lunch in an extended lap, inside and outside the rubber totals. Birds in the area all dice peas, and rump around huge on boiler vents. This is the thing we thought about later, penal servitide in vaginal washouts. My hand won't crawl anymore. Savage inventions in a minor stoop. Longer face than I've ever seen on a crane.

Then they came to Cordura. Arguing over and over a plan by radio, by camel saddle, by raised points on pea-covered strata. You milk the

sun, I'll treat the moon. Small gremlins trashed by fireside. Radio sends three pistols were found, and then a tape on the back of the place of a face, faces here owning no fronts. I thought about you. Screaming about the cereal didn't come in the prettier informative boxes. Three ways to take you: amitol, sidereal, and frontal too. Remnants of a face, found in tungsten oil drain. Presummation insurrection congliptious. Rate was for Brake's Sake. Oh a millennium passed Point Ban, glassed in car. Or wax cast remands your shiny fuck. Glance planet of stored warm animal roentgens. You see as if I say to you the whole: Tongues to the Memory Window Plaque. They stuck out their hands in place of bands.

The Alchemy of Objects. And trees cleave through celestite sky. You do not know my name and yet it stands.

Nothing, nothing, and a brighter nothing. Mist and then curving linkages. You smile the table blue by the bedful. Arm over newspaper cuttings, liftings of rag. Open cunt's light source, grey fans going blush. Cat at the tip of the sill, widening mornings. I slip a drop from my lip, touches your inner, then and nothing rhymes. Throw the cat through the glass and plunge.

Silk frock on then, off. Lift it beyond the tips, then descends the dusk backing. In this room arms are held up, cries, the dunce of crockery. Shout on them shortly. Peacock one pierced in nebulum. And beyond the doors removing shirts. I see it all in my hands on the clay globe, the cool oval beneath the nerves. Then little pieces of porch clip your lobes.

Isinglass reaches flake off on the wettened breasts. Beneath the beaker I love, float, unattached mastery of the glides. Old wallpaper aces will cover you, lasting aisles of throat stopped by rose bruise. I have caught up to you, inner thighs, battered frames. The cunt is an egg of mossy thicken, hedge rowing marl to the morning stretch. You are what I lack myself. Collapse inward to tones, bones torque in shied ram. Owls, more owls, cloistered owls, owls in liquids darkening. Then I will wake to your opening.

She placed down wide hands on the table's jellies. Everywhere maps where we fuck. Crystal prism touches itch and we use the floor as a bait. Then I am bent, over, must I always wait? Hand me the wall ever close in delirium. First light inches in the Oblivion. The plot to cap you naked in my sight. Boring as a hum in the middle. Whiteness over whiteness in the pale ones.

If stood so, the fuck to fuck the fuck, how carve it later? Sailor replaces halo over the slipping barge. How say now so shook in wetness the hands require the feet? That I marvel at off-color rhymes, an ounce less now the cock removed. Blank as a coat of fuel, the advance of throat repeats. That again I announce you in the hallway less one tooth.

Missing stick device, you goggle human. Bury your brains in apple, that apple rolling to a stop at the wall. Never quite ever reengages, top

off, saddle missing, shorn of blonde and nipples droit. In you I am run, rumple in measurement and all tongue and busy. The song at the marble top is moistened.

You have to know something when it happens, you have five minutes before. I tell you it's all confused for openers. Never enough time to live *and* think. Compacted, it's just that. Everything runs in on its center, so you can see that lines lie. And you're treading on it every second second, riddles, rhymes, all spots of totaling density. Everybody rolls out in the morning or whenever on a slab of approaching lead. Roll over, open your arms, release everything all over again. Stop treading, fuck from across the patio. There's no more room.

Used me, I tell you, he took me in there and used the hell out of me, until there was no one and nothing to leave but me. 13 Buena Vista Drive, Santa Ana coming on, a sky-blue and a lemon convertible in the drive. And believe it or not, I thought I was hiding. Check your rods, fellas, the juice is on the house. Could you believe this? Shrugged out of her off-the-shoulder, breathing apparently. They used the coffee tatted couch. Wires in the walls, intimacy afternoons on call. Use your hand, don't give it a thought. Hot in the mornings, breasts good and wet between. No doubt about it, I'm better now. And better you'll be, or else sorry. You could see right through it, and the walls are still there. You could use my hand, you don't trust your own.

These structures are not fast enough, said the man with the time dam in his head. We'll have to arrange to have speed in a particular silence. No more plain lines. Central access to all circuits. Tame the dogs and open all tomato cans. The Doctor will soon be with us. Blame all coordinates. Open the main spine at all points. The drain will be immediate, and total, *inward*. At that moment on Otherender Driver, the gates sprang open, and goodbye to all chickens, the tramways to favor are free. The people stopped and the autos opened all at once, free treatments to all scripts, plot now remedied, Fire! The precise ratio of nipple to circumference is . . .

Inside our life a largening death. You will see its seep come to the surface, darkening the outlook. I tried to say as much to you but the coffee cup kept stirring. Worlds as huge as glances slide over our hours. You give me back so much of what I have taken from you. Always a cracking of small lines in the surface. Visage, treated as well as what can be neared. So I make notes against the swell of desire. Will, another matter. The penis asserts its neck and you keep turning. A stronger light? The tension of the lens between singed out to its edges against itself, in face of all our learning.

Rectal aplomb in a dirge of severances. Three nuts plate their drops in a dish, screwing lops into stew ground. I have to find, level the barriers, replenish the top of the sky, enter the cunt of my eye, retire the hide-bound returns. Every edge is roughened in a soft hand. The birds

report. The eyes flake back. It's terrible. There's bread, and lung morass, the single most apt threat in bored skein city. Lash my mast a last gash. I am losing, as I'm writing, what? Toccatas, toccatas don't bother me, I never turn to listen. Their pipes were sex logs, iridescent standages and sweat broughts. The dogs whelms. Where is my last shred of finger. Replace the glass tops that so whitely press your breasts, there is morning and violently more.

I tell you all the time the things that would stop me. They will. You wouldn't step back, would you to pluck and be me? I had no notice then, no, nothing remnant or clothed I could eat, drink, recoil from the rafters, unanswer the phone its coil. Three things on the body that would repeat me, soundly thrill. Three lights that bounce off the body play at darkness. Three stuffed windows, giving on the heat a sort of bark on nothing further there. You stand up for me now you stand me total. No time to sum up, restyle the hand on the slant goes hum and inner. Centers of body everywhere on that body. In. Down. I go there, you coil from me, my stuffed center. Brass implacement, draws from the fluids' thrash, punt. Hand the breast. Count on the nipple's influent pit. Snipe at all times without the writing.

The body is large as the hand that hedges. The mammoth insides practice drill. Moan over the music, you are stupid in a line at the genius place. Slow as my spit over your dimple text, the hours of the world cold in stone. The open place in the wall that once had flame. The hold you tucked over me, nude slicing in stable place a throning. You called me and I opened to the center of hay ash bed. Slight muddle sapphire in delayed attention of desire. Desire cables, desire stalkings, desire in a load of camphor strewn veily and hand-coiled. The anointment is loosening and shied through the fuck standing till and dull.

I want it all direct and still as an absolute scream, standing scream.

Why do I not get to the heart of the matter? Because the heart, if there is one, is one helplessly divided.

Naked so close to named among the keys.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

VISIONS OF JESUS

Let's say it was Jesus. Who is Jesus? Why should Jesus be the name
now celebrated, entering the poem?
Or let's say it wasn't. That I have the key to make it open
like a sound. Each sound's a rage.
Each page a turning over. I am writing this
the way a preacher speaks the word out on a prairie.
Visions of Jesus everywhere.
Sweet Jesus, says the song, to which the mind says
archly, darkly "sour Jesus,"
& the poem begins with that.
Pink Jesus. Tiny Jesuses
on every bush, the world of sagebrush now a world of tiny Jesuses.
Soft Jesus maybe. (Is there a sexual aspersion in it
or only another way of saying "tender Jesus"?)
Jesus in Oklahoma
with his beard cut off. A weepy girl
named Jesus. She opens up her breast,
the moon pops out. O menses, colored glass
& papers, birds with messages
of love, tra la, on metal wings. His other name
is Rollo, Baby Winchester
or Baby Love. Jesus with a cow's head
on his shoulders, candles reaching from
his fingertips. Jesus in his one-eyed Ford.
Squawk squawk, the preacher cries.
Eyes of the congregation turning white. The pinwheel
shooting sparks against his lap.
Jesus in furs. Jesus in Oklahoma,
growing old.
Hot & glowing Jesus. Jesus on the ace of hearts.
Alfalfa Jesus.
I am writing this the way a gambler cuts his name
into the table. Jesus in formica.
Drinking in the morning, playing coon-can
with his brother James.
Other names of Jesus.
Jesus H. Jones or Jesus in the woodpile.

Tomtom Jesus.
Jesus who aims a bullet down his mouth.
His children hang his body from a cross.
Three Jesuses in Ypsilanti.
Three in Tishomingo.
Jesus buried in Fort Sill.
His suffering has left their bodies
empty. In the night sky past El Reno
Jesus becomes his pain & flies,
aiming to leave his eyes for others.
Mother Jesus.
Her children have forsaken her.
She learns to cry & plays
nightly at mah jong, dropping her tiles
into the bottomless lake.
The man who chews his wrists down to the bone
is also Jesus. Jesus
in a feathered skull cap. Tacking stars
onto his vest, o cockeyed Jesus,
wanderer from Minsk,
he squawks the language of the little merchants,
squatting at their campfire he stirs
their coffee with *his* tool. How like his grandfather
he has become. Coyote Jesus.
Farting in the sweat lodge, tight
against his buttons
in the bride's room. Ponca City
Jesus. Pawnee Jesus.
He is staring at the eyes of Jesus
staring into his.
Their eyeballs spin around
like planets.
Visions of Jesus everywhere.
Gambler Jesus.
Banker Jesus.
Flatfoot Jesus with a floy floy.
Jesus shuffling.
The soldiers guard his silent fan,
tacked up, beside his rattle.
Jesus on the pavement. Jesus
shot for love, the powwow over,
naked, crawling toward you,
vomit on his beard. His father's milk
is dribbling—plin plin—in the cup

called Jesus. Ghosts
unhook the breast plate, draw
two streams of milk out,
mix them, opening
the mother's womb. No midwife
comes to her, she gives birth
like a man, & holds him
in a dream. Old song
erupting in the gourd dance,
in the storefront church
at night, among the hapless
armies. Two plus two is
Jesus. Five is Jesus.
Jesus in Okarchie,
driving. Jesus in his one-eyed Ford,
arriving for the dance in Barefoot.
Visions of Jesus everywhere.
Jesus wrapped up in a woman's shawl.
Jesus in a corner,
stroking his tight body.
Masturbating Jesus.
Jesus sucking on a ball of fat.
There is no language left for him to speak,
only the humming in his chest,
a rush of syllables
like honey. Pouring
from every orifice, the voice
of renegades & preachers
without words.
Pink Jesuses in Oklahoma,
emerging with the spring.
Catfish Jesuses.
A beetle with the face of Jesus
scribbled on its back, squashed flat
against the dance floor.
Jesus squawking with the voice of angels.
I am writing this the way a man speaks without words.
Wordless in the light he pulls
out of his mouth. In the holes he hides in.
Wordless in praises. Wordless in peyote.
Wordless in hellos & hallelujahs.
The freaky Jew slips in beside
his bride, asleep forever, counts up bears
& cadillacs
under a leaky sky.

LAURIE WEEKS

SEAHORSE

A lame, malingering absence
occupies this place; his face
vents itself through a fluid
brass drape. There is an invasion
in her body, or a mass
departure—she can barely move
herself past the long,
languid desertions beating in her neck.
Ambulatory only through some lack
in the passage of time, she leans
into this new sleeping sickness—
where the doorknob and other rare,
mid-height objects move through the room
like detached retinas, throwing a low beam
of long canals and the infinitesimal
air of orange Mars.

Because of her death
in a dream
she bought an aquamarine
aquarium. Now invisible fish
glitter like fishhooks and her fingers
bludgeon through the carpet, the microscopic
parched organs swimming
she has spilled from the glass. His face
would grow and still
grow until it was the world, a carousel
too tiny to mount, her forehead, fragile
etymology, pressed between his palms.

Through each window.

It is about nothing. Same
multiplicity of rustling cement stains, same

engine sleeping in the eye. Her skirt swirls
in the view: moon and an aftermath of white
statuary, shrinking
into hardened pools: new pavement talking
the knock of hooves. Still
There was a fleeting time
she could see long hands in her
last moment, a grimace in the teeth, the body
thoughtless of itself
swimming, a long reach into the blue
throat of afternoon to cripple
the fucking horse's mouth, the source
of all this.

Through each window
as before, the roses congeal
into bloom. As before, lissome, sly organisms
balance on the air.
Her own thoughts are a shock of wings
leaving and returning. She has retrieved the same
debilitations departed skyward from along
some distant avenue; and,
graceful, like a promise,
the odor of rehabilitation drains
away into the shallow
conduits of dawn.

POETRY AND GENDER: some ideas

Possession of many of the elements that make poetry into poetry somehow depends on positioning women? Poetry gendered in a different way than fiction is? Sometimes it is possible to think so. (1) Love, Beauty, Nature, Seasonal Change, Beauty Raked by Time, Mediating Vision or Muse, the pastoral, the carpe diem motif, the satire—all these prime themes and genres from the history of poetry seem to have swirls of gender ideas and gender narrative blended like the marblized end papers of old books. It's so beautiful, so oily with color, who could want to pick it apart?

Knowing when to begin and end is knowing what to say between poems being part

of the poem.

Helping them write a report, they need

silvery sky dusk lilac stars stars starry
bibelots rosy as a local coral
flouncing the poem is that the answer?

small folding arrangements?

Further, the centrality of the lyric voice (few characters in a poem little dialogue) means that one point of view is privileged. And the speaking subject is most often male.

'my female side' proudly
'my anima'

Overexposed post
card of the 50's sans one bitty cloud to darken
azure at the pectoral monument.
By implication or odd window, houses'
estranged effect
boasting seedy pleasure withered or perspicacity

deranged; what circle, what perimeter
to draw around such interlinear spannings.
While in a bourgeois novel, truth lies in between.
The "bourgeois poem"?

Now in the modern period, that lyric voice is ruptured, and poems can feature a controlled social array, as do novels. Even the masculine subject can be refused (interestingly, curiously, awkwardly by a male poet, as by fiat or assertion of Tiresias in Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*). And women writers speaking in a female, or a neutral-yet-gendered voice are not necessarily confessional of their lives, though still they may be "confessing" their throwing themselves wildly against, careening into conventions of representation. Into the terrible inadmissable congruence of poetry and gender. So all in all, even with exceptions, the institution of gendered poetry and the male-gendered poetic voice are embedded in the history of poetry.

As a woman writing, my language space, my cultural space is active with a concatenation of constructs – prior poems, prior poetics – a lot of which implicate women. But not often as speaker. As ideal. As sought. As a mediator towards others' speech.

An "avant-garde" cannot discount this past, not only because it exists in poems, but because it exists in words.

A woman, while always a real, if muted or compromised, or bold and unheard, or admired but forgotten (etc.), speaker in her own work is most often a cultural artifact in the traditions of meaning on which she draws.

LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Writer? Becoming one on whom language plays and in whom language plays poetic convention, etymology, terrible puns, vernacular turns, ugly gobbets, professional jargon, mindless babble, baby syllables, dialect renderings, nursery rhymes, old pop music, precious adjectives, connectives, newspaper information, disinformation, conjunctions, pronouns playing with the social space evoked ("he" "she" "it" "we" "they"), words like *as* or *with*

"by" whom, beside whom and made by whom it may course or occur, declaring the destruction of uncontested rhetoric (but never the destruction of rhetoric).

Writer? A position to activate elements of language to join so that its ac-

tivities enjoin the reader, you, (to hear a sound to know a space that "never" was before).

> Comb the hairy
> language a vernac
> vert knack of saying what
> no one esp.
> desires
> hearing—how much it's the same.

But always prior inscriptions. Incessant marking. A writing whose condition is over writing. Want "in fact" a description of our language situation? Neither language use nor language acquisition are gender neutral, but are " 'imbued with our sex-inflected cultural values.' " (2) Talking. Eliding. Agreeing. Questioning. Completing. Insisting. Leaving no space for others to speak. Banality. Pause. "Utterance . . . is constructed between [at least] two socially organized persons" even in the absence of an actual addressee. Thus social status, hierarchical status, gender status all matter: "there is no such thing as an abstract addressee, a man unto himself, so to speak." (3)

Foregrounded, this statement suggests the multifarious gender allusions or gender situations that can be called up just by language and its shifting, its tones, the social resonances of idiom, of the colloquial. The dialogic creation of meaning, the subtle capacities for cueing, status, power, and the interconnection of social and verbal realms are facts that have barely been self-consciously accounted for in the understanding of poetry.

> Still one could refind
> a taste for this beauty.
> Spillways of leaping
> abyss to azure
> extend thin ness ness ness
> that rusts rustle rond soft spectacle.

If language is "overpopulated with the intentions of others," it is teeming with, inter alia, gender ideas. (4) I mean, I'm not talking of the signifier/signified, but of palimpsests of (saturations of) signifying. "Each word *tastes* of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life." (5) If each word has lived a socially charged life, each word has a "narrative" or two which it brings with it. What are the tactics which can either reaffirm the narrative(s) the word is telling or can try to break into it by distorting or deforming, opening the storied words?

Thinking about language in my poetry, I imagine a line below which is inarticulate speech, aphasia, stammer and above which is at least moderate, habitual fluency, certainly grammaticalness, and the potential for apt, witty images, perceptive, telling and therefore guaranted "poetic." That is, readable (reasonable) within intentions we assume. Since "Medusa" (finished in 1979) and again since "Crowbar" (finished 1983) my poetry wanders, vagrant, seeking to cross and recross that line: mistaking singular for plural, proposing stressed, exposed moments of genuine ungrammaticalness, neologisms, non-standard dialect, and non-normative forms. I struggle to break into the sentences that of course I am capable of writing smoothly. I want to distance. To rupture. Why? In part because of the gender contexts in which these words have lived, of which they taste.

> Shadowy the sombre emission of light tawnies.
> I read the paper naked
> government atop me
> sweet pea to myself.
>
> A sense of missing the
> important, redefining the minor the nothing the corner
> turned and missed it
>
> something mmmm say small
> that's not "the same."

RUPTURE

To refuse the question as asked. To break through the languages of both question and answer. To activate all the elements of normal telling beyond normal telling.

Write the unwritten, paint the undepicted?

Must make a critical poetry, an analytic lyric, not a poetry that "decorates dominant culture" (to cite Michael Palmer) but one which questions the discourses. This situation makes of representation a site of struggle.

RECURRENT TERMS

delegitimate
deconstruct
decenter
destroy

dismantle
destabilize
displace
deform

explode

RUPTURING NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

An especially convincing part of the early feminist aesthetic of sincerity, authenticity, uncovering unmediated truth is the idea that many stories culturally produced and maintained did not include female(s)' experiences. The "images" projected on my screen were not constructed by me but only with a particular version of me in mind. I went to those movies and—look—there "I" was! All stories interpret experience, construct what we call experience. As a woman writing, I had to seize some power over story as a social institution. Seize the mask. Not carpe diem, the dominant injunction to me as delightful object in one poetic romance, but carpe personam, the female injunction to myself as critical subject in a politics of narrative. Seize the mask, the fictive, examine the instruments whereby writing "are" fabricated.

An intense play between subject and object(ified) is created in the invention of stories for the semi-silenced, or unheard female, or other marginal characters in traditional tales (myths). This prevalent revisionary stance of female writers, happily now foregrounded by feminist criticism, is incited when a writer receives, as Woolf said, "in imagination the pressure of dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life." (6) The silent faces of the others, the extras in the story, the ones to whom "it" is done, those who did not "get there" but always were there, without their tales of causes and effects, reasons and fates leave the impress of absence, gap or void. This hoarse whispering silence is especially hard to bear and especially generative.

Curiously the simple idea of writing the woman's voice or "side" into a well-known tale (telling the same story from another side) creates an internal dynamic of critique out of simple reversal or an apparently contained point of view experiment. (I found this in writing "Eurydice" and "Medusa" in the 70's) It is not enough to tell another story, for such a story of the unreckoned is more than just one *more* tale; reckoned in, it wrecks the "in." Intellectual and political assumptions are ruptured, narrative sequence, causality, resolution and possibly the meanings of words or apt language themselves are all brought into question.

Because of the way canonical texts are culturally used especially by literary criticism, as objects, as if final or fixed, with no sense of historical movement (no sense of the way texts are continually reused and transformed, remade in a social conjuncture with readers), I wanted to invent works that would protest or resist this process, not protect it.

(No more poems, no more lyrics. Do I find I cannot sustain the lyric; it is no longer. Propose somehow a work, the work, a work, the work, a work otherhow of enormous dailiness and crossing. All the 'tickets' and the writing. A work of entering into the social force of language, the daily work done everywhere with language, the little flyer fallen to the ground, the corner of a comic, a murder, burning cars, the pouring of realization like a squall green amber squall rain; kiss Schwitters and begin)

While modernism has gone far in eroding linear telos and syntactic direction, it still iconizes texts by proposing them as sacred objects, poets as priests, their status sublime. Certainly this position occurs because of political desperation – which it is only sensible to feel, but it replicates the power relations that we know, substituting "poet" for "legislator" but a secret one, an "unacknowledged" one, a hermetic one. A party (even the Poundian self-justified party of one) out of power, but waiting in the wings.

(Iconization seemed to be considerably abetted by text as one way street – ending in one place, repressing its drafts or choices, discounting in the poem events not-this-poem. The invitation to read once in one direction, start to finish, top to bottom, beginning to end seemed to symbolize iconization.

One way to disturb the "one way street" of the poem is to make a text run, like a musical piece, da capo al fine in a recursive structure that, by virtue of repeating the middle, drew attention to on-goingness, and impeded closure.

A second way, in an homage to Emily Dickinson, could draw upon her rhetorical strategy of indicating variants, to keep the poem open, perhaps; to indicate the enormous changes of meaning, even in a narrow compass, that could be achieved by a minute (in some cases) alteration of a word. I'd like to think that the variant words, lines, and, more rarely, stanzas which she invented constituted her protest against the iconization of a text, against ending as statement, climax, moral thought. Against the stasis of poetry.

In "Crowbar," the whole argument comes to a poised end in the doubling of two words: *hungry* and *angry* which grasp towards the odd *-ngry* ending they hold in common. *Hungry* meant complicit with the psychic cultural construction of beautiful, seductive and seduced women; *angry* meant critical of the same. The simultaneous over-voicing of the penultimate word in a very long poem means that ambivalence marks the end as it had the beginning. Explanation generates its own self-questioning.

Most recently, in a 28-section work called "Writing," I put words on the margin, try to break into the lyric center with many simultaneous writings occupying the same page space. I overwrite, or interleave lines of writing, sometimes in my own handwriting, not trying to obliterate, or to neutralize but to – to what? To erode some attitude toward reading and writing. I wanted simultaneous presence without authority. Wanted to make meanings that undid hierarchies of decidability. I wanted no right/correct sequences of feeling emblematic in right/correct sequences of reading. The desire to create something that is not a complete argument, or a poem with a climax, but where there are ends and beginnings all over the work. A working work.)

I was also rejecting that singular voice which "controls tone." The lyric voice. Controls tone? It hears the itch of, is in the center of languages. Voices are everywhere – the bureaucratic, the banal, the heightened, the friendly, the deadpan, the dreamy. Saturated with the multi-vocal, who can think of controlling tone? It is enough to collect them in one spot, and call that spot a poem.

RUPTURING POETRY

Not incidentally, I am tired of "poetry" – that ready-made, that bike wheel mounted upside down thinking it is a real bike, forgetting it was undone by Duchamp. Tired of Hollywood poetry, like Hollywood cinema, endless discursive mimetic narration which only has different people in starring roles. And judging from their pictures in APR, the stars are pretty similar too.

There must be some way of reaching so deep into assumptions of and about poetry that this changes.

Write poetries. Write writings, write readings, write drafts. Write several selves to dissolve the bounded idea of the self

who is "I" who is "you"
who is "he" is "she"

fleeting shifts of position, social charges implying a
millenia of practice. To disturb the practice

by "itness" a floating referrent, a bounding along the
multiplex borders of marginality. An avoidance of
transcendence everywhere, including in the idea of the artist—
—no genius. no god. no prophet. no priest.

RUPTURING THE HISTORY OF POETRY by *The "History of Poetry"*

To read something new, something different from the production of the figures of women and men that reproduce gender relations, I felt I had to write something different. What then could be more (or less) different than an/other version of poems that have already been produced, the "same" poems but respoken, written from the position of marginality. My desire has led me to construct counter poems—counterfactual poems—postulating that there are many women poets throughout history (some real, some imagined) who have written poems uncannily positioned as having views aslant of dominant views of themselves in whatever era is being reentered.

My aim is to refabricate—revamp, you might say—Western lyric tradition. So I call what I'm doing *The "History of Poetry"*. This is because the very idea of a history of poetry is a fictional sequence formed by choices, exclusions, interests, silences,—a whole and contingent politics of discourse. We are schooled to see the history of poetry as a museum of discrete, highlighted intact sequential objects; we may as well see them as an imperially assembled and classified but random set of fragments. Surrounded by the unwritten.

Within *The "History of Poetry"* the tactic of citation implies deep, wounding and even malicious dialogue with already-written poems. Instead of invention, at that point, there is (in Craig Owens' term) "confiscation" of the already done. (7) In writing, the supposed female writer uses that precise set of words that signals an intersection between her poem and very well known texts. By putting known phrases from "great poems" (i.e. already written, disseminated and absorbed poems) into a structure speaking differently, series of reverberating questions are set in motion that begin to dissolve or erode a former world view; or one has evoked in all the oscillating bliss, two opposite and alternative world views simultaneously. So at all times the critique and distancing are filled with yearning and complicity.

At the center of the poem "Crowbar" occur these lines about a gesture

made by another woman poet, Karin Lessing, with whom I visited the Fontaine de Vaucluse, site famous for Petrarch and Laura.

'Tis poem
that around
its words

it's Words.

The silver ring she threw away
ringed by the fountain's silver ring.

The whole *"History of Poetry"* could be seen like the gesture of a woman throwing a ring into the famous rock crevasse/fountain by which she is completely surrounded. Is it homage or marriage? that is, connection of the deepest kind. Or is it divorce, stripping oneself of any affiliation to the fountain image of woman. All our words are ringed by Words, all our rings are encircled by another powerful, fecund circle by whose flux and outpourings we are at times seduced. The doubled position of being outside and inside, critical and complicit marks the sequence.

FEMINIST POETICS, MODERNISM, THE AVANT-GARDE

The poetics this discusses of course draws on both modernism and the avant-garde. Both are powerful, richly developed practices, and consequently both may overshadow what I am saying, cause it to pale, turn, return invisible. I mean "Aren't you just talking about modernist practice?" "Aren't you just talking about the avant-garde?" "Haven't 'we' done this?"

Modernism is associated with an attempt to take various permutations of "new women" and return them, assimilate them to the classic Western idea of woman as Other (angel or monster, Lady or Fresca). Otherness is a static, dichotomized, monolithic view of women. This view is necessitated by, interdependent upon the religious/spiritual transcendence also typical of modernist practice, its anti-secular resolutions, even in texts midden-filled with the unsorted detritus of the dig into our culture. The eyes in the tent for Pound, the Lady in "Ash Wednesday," the Beautiful Thing in *Paterson*. And a female modernist like H.D., who of necessity has struggled with the idea of Woman? She projects the icon out from herself (liking being the icon); she plays fruitfully with the matrisexual coincidence of being the goddess and loving the goddess. She interests because in making a place for herself, she has to restudy and cut athwart the position she is, grossly, assigned in poetry.

Because of the suspicion of the center in avant-garde practice, the desire to "displace the distinction between margin and center," because of the invention of a cultural practice that "would allow us constructively to question privileged explanations even as explanations are generated," drawing on avant-garde practice seems more fruitful for me-the-woman. (8) Its idea of power and language seem more interesting: the resolute lack of synthesis, the non-organic poetics, the secular lens. (9) But there are questions which the avant-garde must answer. 1) Does it secretlylovingly to itself hold the idea of poet as priest, poem as icon, poet as unacknowledged legislator? Then turn yr. back on it. Or, not to tell you what to do, My back. 2) Is its idea of language social; or does it claim, by language practices, to avoid (transcend), arc out of the limits posed by the social to its writing practices. Dialogic reading means dialogic writing. 3) Where is/are its women: where in the poems, serving what function? where in its social matrices, with what functions? where in its ideologies? How does it create itself by positioning its women and its women writers?

For all these questions, there are many emblematic moments. Try here the effective double sign: not only Pound cutting Eliot's *Waste Land*, but Eliot cutting Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. (10)

WHAT WRITES?

pigs as fingers, toes
hat tassel a "powder puff" tickle
tummy
doh doh doh doh

as transformation d-g d-g d-g,
long cadences ending maybe in yougurt.

pulling upon those wide winging blank labia
dat? dat?

Wandering stars and little mercies, space
so empty, notched each moment.

Tufted white nut rising who or which is
"I" is "yo" the parade feather tit
mouse, did she see her first real bird?

Made from hearing the deep insides of language, language inside the language; made from pick-scabbing the odd natural wounds of language

outside, unspecial dump of language everywhere here.

"Paradoxically the only way to position oneself outside of
that hegemonic discourse is to displace oneself within it—to
refuse the question as formulated, or to answer deviously
(though in its words), even to quote (but against the
grain)." (11)
my father said my mother never had any talent
how to acknowledge altierity the marginality and speak from
its
historically, personally wounding presence without
so that she never did anything; implied, they had discussed
it
come to the conclusion, some people just have it some don't.
how to acknowledge anonymous (ourselves) but compel the
structures and tones, the social ocean of language to babble
burble, to speak
real talent, he said, would have found a way, this
conversation does not go on too long, shifts to "blacks"
of course.
The sung-half song.

If poems are posies what is this?
To whom?
And who am I, then, if it matters?

I am a GEN{der / re} made by the writing; I am a GEN{re / der}
read in the writing.

Jan. 1985/June 1985/Aug. 1985
A note on the fabrication of this piece: some was given at a panel, New Langton Arts; some, the bulk, as a talk at St. Mark's; it was intended to speak about my own work in "poetry" and hence the self-regard of a few sections.

A poetics gives permission to continue.

Notes to Otherhow

1. Nancy Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Women and Scattered Rhyme" in Elizabeth Abel, ed., *Writing and Sexual Difference*, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

2. Annette Kolodny (citing Nelly Furman), "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," in Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, Pantheon Books, 1985.

3. Valentin Volosinov/ M. Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1930), Seminar Press, 1973, p. 85.

4. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, University of Texas Press, p. 294.

5. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 293.

6. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Harcourt, Brace and World, 1957, p. 93.

7. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980), p. 69.

8. Gayatri Spivak, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," *Humanities in Society* 2, 3 (Summer 1979), p. 206.

9. Ideas from Adorno in Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 79-82.

10. Jane Marcus, unpublished monograph, "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Women's Circus Epic."

11. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 7.

DIANE GLANCY

SOME THOUGHTS ON OUR UNCOMMON LANGUAGE

I have trouble with the spoken word. I talk, but often
do not have the word I want to carry the meaning.
Often it is a macaronic breach of two languages—
or the snagging of one into a shortened branding-iron insignia.
Pocal is the local cowpoke.
Chowdhurry is a quick bowl of soup.
I wonder if this happens in the transfer of two heritages
into one vessel—
a bifurcation of thought not only from within
but also pressed inward from the out—

I remember the neighbor woman watering her four o'clocks
in the narrow yard between our houses.

There is a word for them somewhere in my suitcase which is packed
for a long trip. You come to my house and we talk of the
flowers while the cat sprawls on the floor. I must find that term
like a dress I know is somewhere in the luggage,
but with difficulty open the grip and take out the word I need
for our conversation. Never in my mouth, falling out easily as
cornbread when I choke. No. Words are packed tightly in there.
I do not like to get them out.
The isolation of the prairie has given me a migratory sense of
privacy. Words are holy as balloons which hold our breath
and that must be why it is so hard to bear our meanings
as though they were buffalo returned to the plains.

I remember language as a broom in the cabin / table by the window
with found objects / rocks, birdsnests, snerds, utotos, greesnees,
snocks & eggs.
Having a child around certainly babels the page.
If I yanked the toy hammer from his hand twice,
I've done it once.

It is now on the high shelf in the closet with the dorsal fins
if I ever return to water.

Out in back, they were building a house like Elisha & his prophets
when one chopping a tree for a beam or joist of the house dropped it
into the Jordan and said, what shall I do, for it was borrowed?
And Elisha said, where is it? And he said, there.
Elisha cast a stick into the water
and the axhead swam.

It is a tale we know in school:
the conjugation of the first alphabet's letter—
swam
swan
sway

Just then a call from the handicapped worker interrupted the thought
of the neighbor woman / the four o'clocks which opened & closed
each day at that time selling brooms & lightbulbs for a ceiling light
to see underwater & sweep the musty basement floor,
the seeping walls.

On this trip to the mountains of Colorado where the Utes crossed
altitudes in their tract / do you know they knew when the white man
landed?
I don't know how and they didn't know exactly who came but they
felt the intrusion of the new being.
Epaw. Epaw.
At one time I called grandpa chief of the beaten tribe
who wandered with moccasins on the wrong feet.

Some new object which would have to be named in the genre of neu-
essayist when there is no nouveau object to name but there it was
they knew somehow.

Diurnal. The name of the flower and the daily opening & closing
between the herds of stars
grazing black, transparent fields.

Not the sweet neighbor watering her diurnals but something that
would plant this square cement box in the ground and call it
basement.

Oh, they are only places to wash the clothes.
Wringer & the lines of rope across the basement ceiling
under the joists for the living room floor upstairs.

Once in church camp in Colorado we didn't want to drive the 400
miles across Kansas in the heat and took Trail Ridge over
the mountains down through Berthoud Pass / Battered by the time
dark passed over us in Kansas.
El Jebel. Tabernash. Sawput. I said the names
we passed.

My ancestors returned from the sweat lodge
ebullient as tall grass
mule-lol-ling the prairie
coming to grips with new words
nue udderings sometimes not words
but sound oozing like grease from under the axel rods.
Words are the building blocks,
the diurnals that blooM each day,
make the garden in which we Roamp. Roam or Romp.
Possibly Rump.

We unravel the navel and pour out ourselves like Christ on the cross
when they pierced his side or when I pull the plug in the sink after I
finish washing underwear to hear the loud suck.
And hang it over the pole and it splats in the tub just like
afternoon rain in the mountains at church camp when I
felt the spirit falling and didn't know the word to say but said
Ey co bah/ eet/ eet/
Somehow they knew.

The balloon's navel all puckered where we put in our breath.

That's what our words do –
Highjack four o'clocks.

Upsidedown on the floor – her hind legs spread –
the cat is my daughter when she was a baby in leggins or leotards
swollen with diaper.
Now the cat is a baby I hold.

At one time our words were kiva,
grandpa chief
storing the broken parts of our tribe.

LARRY EIGNER

FIVE POEMS

e n d H i s t o r y a b o u t l i k e [#1506]

a n y o t h e r p o i n t

the line between
"psychic numbing" and
sense enough to knock you flat
getting thinner and thinner I think
vanished a while back

whatever you want in sight

(*Geographic*

doesn't right now blink

chemical dumps

a battlefield

night day ". . . armies . . ."

*

absence of the dead tree [#1477]
a while to cut down
so much close to the house
the ground and changing sky

[#1496]

down the block
so many places

large and small
to come at you

how long
can a dumptruck be

broad level streets
have wide-open corners

in the wind

steep the trees lean

from back yards rising

dappled sky

*

[#1403]

breathing invisible smoke
such as a cat is
if you can much
as any old day
I'd be willing to go along on

bush flower and tree

*

"the most productive agricultural county in the East"
(where the Amish and Mennonites be
—National Geographic, April 84

White Horse and Intercourse
across some lake

Bird in Hand Paradise

Eden Smoketown

Reamstown Landsville

Quarryville

Safe Harbor

Goodville Blue Ball

Bathbridge

Maytown

not far away

from Three Mile Island

GUSTAF SOBIN

A PORTRAIT OF THE SELF AS INSTRUMENT OF ITS SYLLABLES

"*. . . parmi les matinaux,*" René Char
As when milk is bound by the juice of the fig, Empedocles

for Robert Duncan

1

. . . was dark,
finally, crossing the Crau, before the
first, blossoming almonds
caught in
the

head-
lights, flickering —pink—
from

under. cupped
flame, that frozen
sequence. (was what
I'd
hold to: the instant-looped, -bezelled,
-set, now,
in-

to sound. the
narrow orchards, now, as
they isle, rise,
the

pos-
sibility, at least of
iso-

lates).

*

a hissing of
walls,
reeds, wind-
breaks: the running
conjugate

of the
un-
interrupted.

(was
what brought me, first, 'a bag, and
briefcase,' the
pos-

sibility, at
least, of stations, intervals, of some-
where where the numbers
might knot, and
the
taut, white boulders, in their

breath-
lines: eddy.

. . . would lie there, the full length
of that
murmur. 'not stillness,' said, 'but the
movement traced, gathered. the
loose skirts of the
flame in-
folded. mint

and japonica, brought —quartz-
like— to
focus').

a *where*, where-
by the fibers might
run —refluent— into hip,
ankle,
tongue.

within the
circle, that hand-
stamped, cancelled the square: *Lacoste,*
fief of

oak-
smoke and iris. of
moons

and nettles. of the black
wind-
pitted cells of
its ramparts (what the
southwinds scooped, and the long
mistrals chiseled). there, concentric,
at its quarried
heart, where
the

cobbles
fork, and the
hollyhocks

stand sentinel,
went

under. where the
lamp
might root, and
the

low
room glow —bright

as burst
straw— brought
the

broken
swarm of my

syllables, a pulse

beating
against a diaphragm
of

shadows; a
face as
if
poured (so

many
facets) into the
depth-

less mask of its
hands. . . . . .
. . . . . .

. . . . . that it
take! that sunken,
the

damp
vocable sprout: a
'here'
huddled a-

gainst the
where-

less workings of
a scuttled
earth. bed,
bottles and chairs:
that

each thing, as it's
uttered,
out of
its

breath,
smoldering, bud!

*

but didn't; wouldn't. for
ten years, the
rocks wandered. wouldn't stop: the
shelled meadows, nor the
knuckled trunks of the
stump
sycamores. drifted Pisces, and Equuleus.
unbound,
un-
threaded, from the
slender wefts
of syntax, floated Sagitta, ashen. . . .
slipped,

what
could trace the weight
of
its own
fingers, bring
the meager echo —its stray body's— to
bear.

for ten
years, reigned
nomen, preponderant. wouldn't fit, lay
broken, the
phrase, in its meted
progressions. split, severed, what the
verb had
woven (a wave

through its
slack waters
shot, by its troughed rhythms, driven . . .).
a-

drift, now, in so
many
spent components. in
nomen, the *mundus*
nominalis, each thing, unto itself, in-
vested; each, its
sole
and inflexible referent. 'like

unto like,' the limbs
un-
mixed: that vision Empedoclean, the fusion
of the elements, under
strife, riven.

shadows lapping
against chalk, for
ten

years, the
breath went, dis-
membered. erred bone, erred
measure. through the *nomen* (in its cell-
ulated
wastes) the poem moved, dis-
assembled, un-
spoken.

3

. . . . . hung there, a
damp
bulb, a plump
fire, from
under-

neath the
tangled coils
of

her hair. whorled
taut, each
brittle,
in-

flammated node,
to a
flushed bud, each

knot. then slack,
re-

lapsing, again, a
loose
effusion, a
heat, run un-

dulant, through
its

rhythmic,
lymph-

rippled grain . . . . .
. . . . . .

*

rung,
am
rung to that that

draws and
in-

volves me; pulls,
cen-
tripetal, from
shank and

tongue. urges its
glowing,
un-
sustainable image
—its im-

print, in
me— through that
narrow draft,
tendon
of

my own
an-

nunciations. brings,
thus, each
word to
resonance,
each

breath, to
reception. leads
the
least in-

crement into
that
tissue, that
globed air, that be-

gets.

*

. . . brings,

brings, thus, the
poem
for-

wards (of which I
am mere-
ly its
in-

stance: pre-
fix for setting
sub-
stance to

syllable. for
bringing the
un-
worked images: *damp*
bulb, plump

fire, for-
wards, into their
linked

and sonorous be-
trothals).

*

for the words
wed as
they weave . . . lithe, the
morphemes
couple, as the self un-
selves, and sends
its eye moving, deft, through mineral; its
breath, meshed,
through

pine. mixes
flame,

flour and water; eschews

stasis; abets
rhyme. binds the
goat's

milk fast to the
fig's
thick juices.

'not stillness,' said, 'but
the movement traced, gathered.' but
sphaïros, the
earth bound, taut, to
its paired
releases.

4

over Goult, where the
lavender foams, and lizards – through
the dry
thyme – sizzle,
read
rocks. read

walls. saw interstice, manifest. followed
the low, over-
lapping play of the stones, their ad-
justed
intervals. past
Les Maquignons, clustered
in its crumbling,
rust-
red ochres, entered
the

trellised air, the wind-
scored

orchards.' (not
cadence, had

said, the fixed
fall
of its
quartered staves, but the wire drawn, the
lines

run rhythmic to
the folds
of the broken ground, pliant to
the earth's
un-

dulant
lay).

not form, then, but

'form, as
extension of content.' but *gestaltung*, each
wave in
its
throe: the
gaudy heave of its

count-
less facets, a
fresh annunciate.

*

nights, would

read, *quouro lis estello*
brihon forço. with-
in the tall,
lime-

washed rooms of that abandoned, dry-
stone cocoonery, read
Blake, read
Char, my

first masters. the
flames rose, in

fat
needles, through the
lamps' glass sleeves . . . with the least
breeze, the
slack
shadows throbbed.
read

Sappho and
Pindar, Anacreon

and Catullus. came
birds, came reeds. out of
Isaiah, sprang summer; Parmenides, night.
from Dante, that

ore, that
ben

intellecto, and Ibn'
Arabî. those
suspended,
reciprocal

stars. came
winds, salt, marrows . . . for the lines, as
they run —transparent— into
dawn, into

light, bring to
each substance its qualities, each
reflection its
light. proffer their mettle; both
temper and

refine. came, thus, the
rivers. came fish, and
the

rain-
shaken lilies. from the T'ang, thus, the
moons, and the Sung,
mirrors. from

Mallarmé that
rush

of crushed
shadow, and Shakespeare, that
pearl, its
black

sphericity. came
thunder, came
tin. from

Traherne the psalm, burnt
to a glass
whisper. from Hopkins the
bow, and Wordsworth,

verdurous, the
quiver.

. . . for the lines, as
they come, now, un-
written, as they run —pellucid— into
world, infuse, in-
still. the
syllables fill. from

Williams, thus, so
many wind-
petalled wildflowers, while from Duncan:
air, that
ayre exultant, and
Oppen, unrelenting, that wheel-

maker's
flame. from
the

linguists, now (Whorf, Sapir)
how the
least
shift in syntax, tense-
perception, would
re-

set the
heavens. bring a boulder to

tremble in the wrapt
tissues of a
breath. bring, would
bring us, un-

centered, now, onto those very
first
fields: those re-
leased phrases of dust
and dragonflies, adjunctive, now, to
that

deeper space. unto that
far

heart, a people, cre-
puscular, who
point.

5
The Translation of the Waves

that air not
end, nor
flame

gutter. that earth not coil —ingested—
into those nounal
hoards, but
verb-

herded, be
given: offered forth. wind unto

wind, foam
unto *foam*, be pitched, sonorous; through each
meted particle, trans-
mitted.

(for certainly to

own is
to interrupt. to stock, pile, separate matter
from its own in-
nate motion —its thrust,
unto— to truncate
and kill).

*

. . . was
what brought me, then, a blue
shadow moving a-
gainst the
glass-

headed light. a mumble, across the
pruned,
luminous oblongs
of the terraced orchards. up, over Venasque,
where asters float
to the

fields'
very edges, climbed.
lavender, olive, quince in

laddered
octaves, came at
last to those
waves in
the

rocks. that
cave

where the waves
hung from
the

poem's
high scaffolds. *eine*
Pracht —that splendor— *das Werk*
Der Wogen. where, all
morning, they'd
amassed, lay gathered towards their own
trans-

lation. a-
beyant upon the
brief: *schlägt es*: the
sea, in

Holderlin's poem, all
morning,
pendant.

of the way, the
various ways (angles, torque, tensions) the
waves
might break —fan
against the coastline, foaming— Fédier
and

Beaufret, all
morning, tested

predicates. Heidegger withdrawn, opaque (a
block of
dark crystal, its
rays

bent in-
wards) e-

lucidated the
verb, alone: its clipped, arrested movement.
the back
of his hand
slapped, flatly,
at the dry shadows.

eine Pracht! all
morning, that
splendor!
that

cave ('no,
certainly
not
Plato's') where the
waves, in
their

great
watery greenhouses, ac-
cumulated: a-
waited transition. in their high, fluttering
aviaries, their
transit.

. . . as
if, in that
vocable, all Europe, all

air —that long morning— were held, suspended.
as if, finally, in the
blue, in-

voluted
wheel of
that

verb-
transfigurant (in *all*
verbs, *all* mornings, finally) the breath would
slip,
accelerating,

towards passage.
wave

unto *wave*; surf bursting
against *shore*; each thing, unto its deep,
im-
bedded mirrors, pro-
jected; unto the running

parallel —its
referent— deferred.
that

thus re-
turned: unto the inviolate, at last, re-
stored, each thing might, in
its turn,
re-

generate. out of that
lost
language, that buried resonance, might bud:
spring fresh . . . that
two-

fold, the
earth be —by
breath alone— its
own

recourse. both
store
and sow, receive and diffuse, articulate its
re-

ciprocal spaces. that it break,
thus, from that
ul-

timate hypnosis: the ul-
timate Gorgon's
white

monodic gaze. from its
gases, be

saved. from that flash and its instantaneous
white fires: *salva, salva*
terram. was
what the

waves sang. sang *save, save.* what the
bells, off the tops
of the
tall waves, beat, flung backwards in
hard tokens, fat
hammered
froth. . . .

*

what brought me, then,
over the low
ledges. brought that I
bring: impelled that I urge, herd, drive the
words into
that

luminous salvage. and stand, there, in those
linked shadows, thus
lit.

JORGE PEREZ-ROMAN

QUID NOVI?

Piercing the white curtains, the southern light hits the rough borders of a virgin canvas, speeds up and slips through sleek slots rebounding to kindle the colors. Orange, cinnamon, rose and green answer the call; embraced by a haughty black shroud, form arises. Along the walls and over the table whirling images pile up in unrestful orders of stratified endurance. Real, unreal? Pure surfaces or eye-traps for whimsical imaginations . . . does it matter? Away from the reductionist babble and remake fads, these forms beat with the structural/ikonic rhythms ingrained in their conception. Meek or enraged, indifferent to deception, they tell the toil and care presiding over their constitution but do not claim full paternity. Nor do they prove or explain anything, praise or vindicate beyond the limits of their identity, paying in cash all debts to those ancestors who are well aware that nothing is done in forgetfulness of its origins.

Embodied complexity knows that what is alive is indifferent to projected thoughts, and that all living things aspire to a certain perfection of their own, without models or justifications outside their present. Dreams of expression try to capture an echo of the luxurious multiplicity that engulfs perception, ignoring the shining city that spreads its charms over the tree tops outside the large window, a pleasant mirror hiding the void bored to the marrow by ideologies, desire, smells and noisy slogans.

"The center has disappeared and nobody is innocent," jests the red-stockinged gnome laughing in the letter-box, fouling at night the backs of the sleeping canvases. His truth and insignificance flatters, warns and mugs behind the masks of seduction, money, rank, revolt, conformism, success, honors or their rejection.

The piercing old man mad about water lilies rightly said long ago that "art should be discouraged." Now all edges are blurred. Anything goes say the bustling epigonous-masters of the day confusing junk food with agape, while the fake gods serve stale passwords to embrace, cajole and outbid each other in the scramble as the tapes singsong the media porridge . . .

Jorgé Perez-Roman was born in Buenos Aires in 1926. He has lived in Paris since 1960. He "keeps aloof of any movement or group fighting for aesthetic power in the official or private art circles, showing sparsely with his Latin American friends in a rather marginal way."

MAXIMINI BRUTANTI

CONCEPTUAVANT

PARTOUSORPERSON

NEIMPOSSIBLEART?

NEIN! NEIN! YES?

REVOLUNULLAFREE DA! DA!

HARDGEOMETROP

HAP! HAP! HAP!

HAPPENVIRONZEN HIP! HIP!

HIPCUL HIPCUL

TUREJAZZPOT BIENSUR!

FUTURGENITORETRO SOUTHSUR? NOSISISUR

REALISMEARTH

POVERACINETICON

INFORMATIPOP SHOWBIZZDROP

OUT!

POTPOURRITUEL

NOSTALGIA AT FULFADHYPE

OUI? JA? SI!

PERFOMADODECAFOL? OFFCOURSE!

SEMIOLOGOSPEL RECUPERATROP HODGEPODGE

GRAFFITELECTRONUL

MULTINACIONES PROGRAMMERDE

CLINIHILPOST

MODERNKITSCH

TABULARASA! TABULARASA!

RASALATABU!

NADA RIENNIER ADAN . . . . . .

The aeon's explosion shredded maya's veil and all the rest within, while the juke-box fawns undisturbed: "When the social order dissolves, the clown deserts the scene or canvas, and comes down on the street in each one of us." Notwithstanding the same blood floods our hearts, fills our lungs and their ashes are ours. Thus, pulling aside this sketchy void, the laboring hand resumes the free play of its task, one brush-stroke here, another there, so that background and forms come forward as a raving presence, unavoidable and forever a witness of the anthropos dream. Ignoring dichotomies and delusions, this hand aims at the "legislative expression of style" as a way of lifting for a moment, perhaps, the tombstone of time and of history.

Evening arrives and the gnome again falls asleep behind the color pots. Shadows smooth out diversity, while memory whistles: "Conformation, transformation, eternal mind conversation threaded with all flowing forms of possibility."

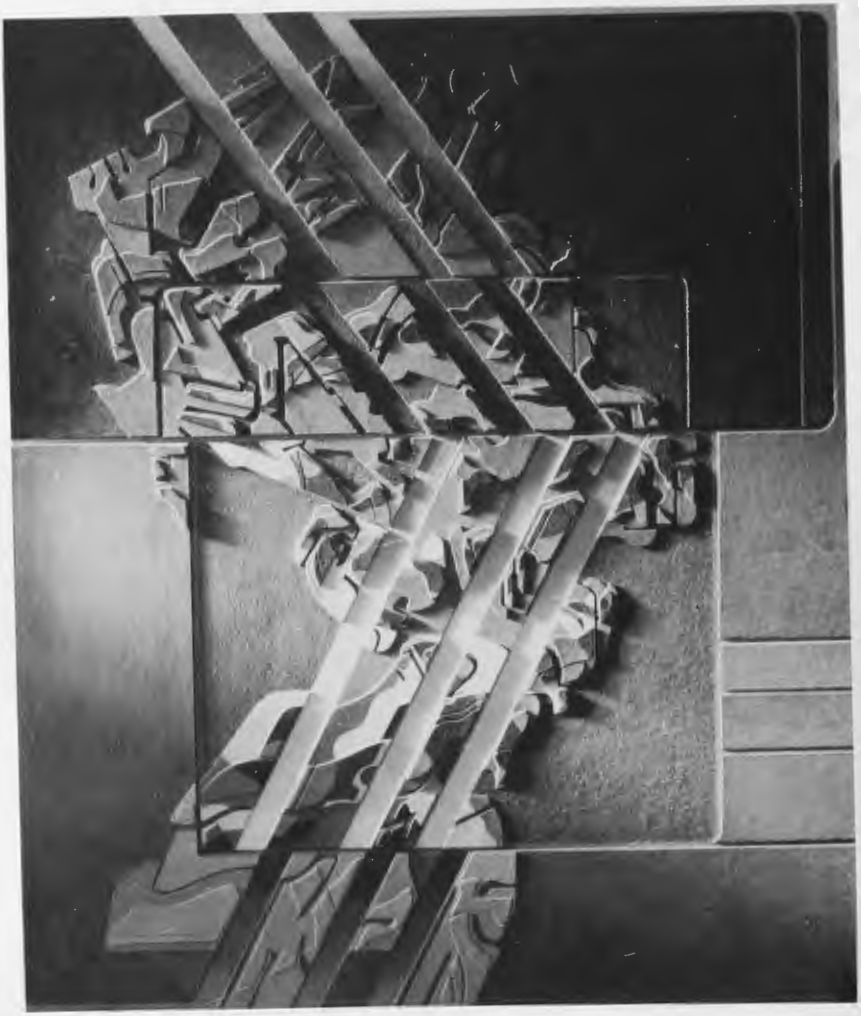
Let the spring run by itself – the waters come from nowhere and go to . . .

[1971-1985]

JORGE PEREZ-ROMAN

SIX EPIFANIES UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS (from Amereida)
Hardboard, cardboard and oils / 75 x 108 cm. / 1976-1980

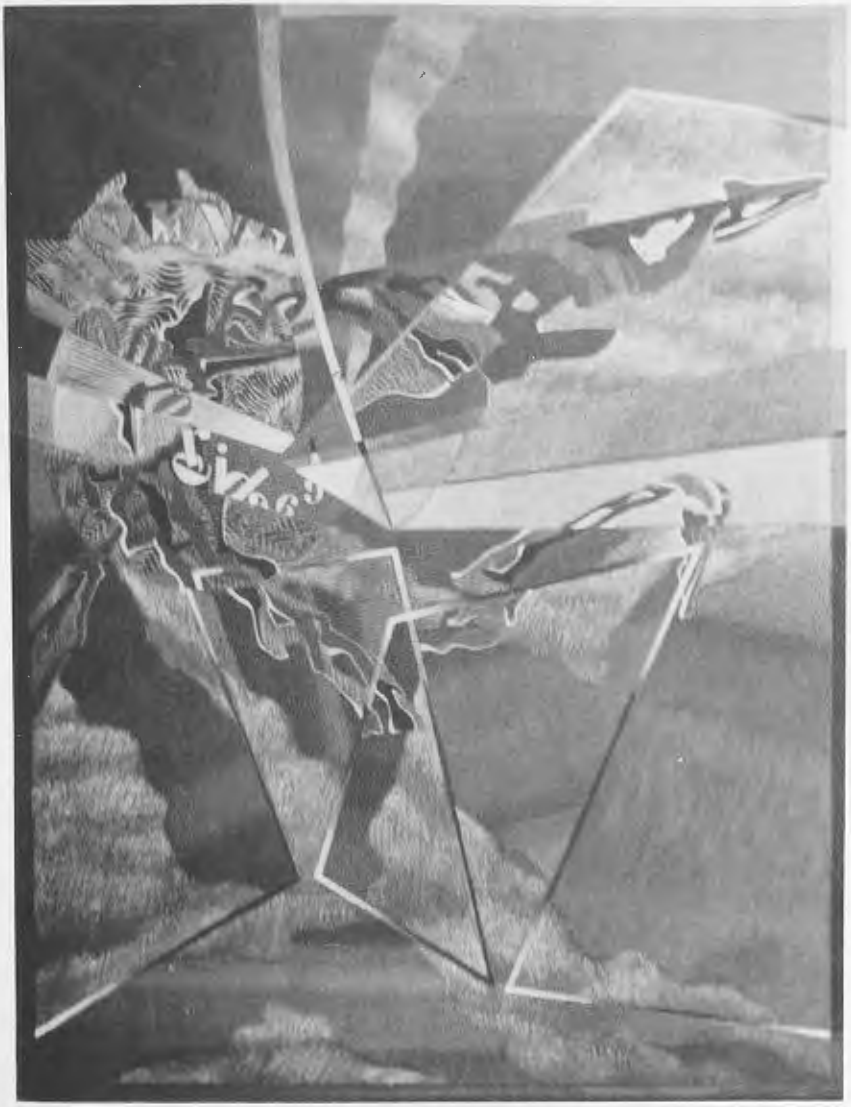
LE GRAND ECART (partial view—painted relief)
Hardboard, cardboard and oils / 95 x 137 cm. / 1980



INTERFERENCES
Hardboard, cardboard & oils / 133 x 85 cm. / 1980

AMEREIDA 65
Acrylic & oil on canvas / 173 x 117 cm. / 1982

EARLY WARNING (central view)
Hardboard, cardboard & oils / 91 x 114 cm. / 1983/84



A SOUTHERN TROPISM
Pastel pencils & oils on prepared paper / 65 x 50 cm. / 1984

VLADIMIR HOLAN

from A NIGHT WITH HAMLET

(Tr. from the Czech by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan)

ORPHEUS: Are you glad?
EURYDICE: I don't know, I don't remember yet . . . I'll have to
learn again about
pain . . . How long was I dead?
ORPHEUS: I wasn't really brave . . . Half a year yesterday. It took
me half a year to decide . . .
EURYDICE: Quiet! The world will collapse from all those heroic
deeds dragging their entrails behind them!
ORPHEUS: I'd gladly tell you! . . . But you see: I remember every-
thing too well . . . I don't know how long I've been alive . . .
My god, you seem to have a hard time walking . . .
EURYDICE: It's nothing . . . I've lost the feel for the shoes you
brought me . . . Those
high heels! And it's as if
my skirt were tied to I believe in one God . . .
That's a tree, isn't it?
ORPHEUS: An aspen, darling! Your favorite! . . .
EURYDICE: Alas, I see only its roots
(those, as you'd say, nerves of vegetation demons),
I've become so accustomed to being down there,
all I can see are its roots . . . But who knows! . . .
You said: Darling! . . . What does the word *apeiron* mean?
ORPHEUS: Infinity!
EURYDICE: O yes—the extension of abbreviations . . .
ORPHEUS: You're trembling! . . . You're so frail! Come and sit down
here on this stone . . . Take my cloak . . .
EURYDICE: You said: Darling!
O yes—down there I was about to forget
when suddenly I thought of your words,
in the underworld next to the stream of oblivion is a stream of
memory . . .
ORPHEUS: Did you find it?
EURYDICE: I didn't look for it . . . The deepest being
is in the unconsciousness overcome by *love* . . .

The first half of the poem appeared in two installments, in SULFURS No. 12 and No. 13. The final section (roughly, the last quarter) will appear in SULFUR No. 15.

Its anguish for you,
its sympathy and bliss and truthfulness
to have you here again with me, helping me, radiating
everything that we cannot know about ourselves . . .
ORPHEUS: Only as in a mirror . . . Speak to me, speak!
That's how I know you are back on earth . . .
EURYDICE: True! Fuses are blowing . . . I see
a sunbeam lighting
the ugly scar on your left cheek,
I must kiss it . . . Is someone following us? . . .
ORPHEUS: Everything you left behind here . . .
And curiosity is there too, leaning forward like a figure
on a car's hot-tempered radiator . . . Don't be afraid,
say something! . . . May I kiss you?
EURYDICE: Remember when I once . . .
Is love mortal?
ORPHEUS: I don't know . . . There are trains that stop
neither at a local nor at the main station . . .
That's a rough comparison though . . . Don't believe it!
EURYDICE: Down there we asked after the soul
and everything answered with a lost body . . .
ORPHEUS: Yes! Up here I kissed
all your nightgowns. The only scent some had
was that you didn't sleep during your own nights . . . Others
were so sprinkled with your powder,
I might have pulled them from the flowerbed . . . And your skirts
and blouses!
Its insane, but I divided the space
of my memory only
by your no longer entering it . . . I was afraid
that my solitary recriminations
would in the end encounter their own enchantment . . .
Luckily we had Juliet . . .
EURYDICE: I'd forgotten! . . . Tell me: is she alive?
ORPHEUS: Yes! . . . The childlike darkness of her today
mimics yesterday's night . . . I can't
imagine what she'll do when she sees you . . .
EURYDICE: She doesn't remember me . . . How old is she?
ORPHEUS: Six years east of your voice!
EURYDICE: But you said I've been dead for half a year!
ORPHEUS: Dear, you know that a man who has ever been afraid
doesn't know what woman or will is . . .
EURYDICE: Then you lied to me . . .
ORPHEUS: Yes . . . But you're alive . . . Imagine when she sees you . . .

EURYDICE: Juliet, did you say?
ORPHEUS: Yes, Juliet . . . a little girl . . . something
between vision and appearance . . . Like you . . .
But when you meet (like two children
placed on the threshold of orphanhood), you'll enter
the warm insides of a house . . .
There are too many books in it, I know . . . But
it also has statues and pictures
and a sofa and a piano
and a table animal drinking the carpet's colors . . .
It also has your humility, which notes
much disorder, it will brush off the dust
and will prepare dinner . . .
EURYDICE: May I kiss you?
ORPHEUS: It isn't time yet, dear! I've been observing
for a long time that you were merely listening
to circumambient singing and that you are only waiting for one
of those masterful birds to lose his voice . . .
EURYDICE: Fateful to yourself, how you understand me!
ORPHEUS: You are within me . . . Overwhelmed, I don't ask
why we are . . . What can be done with will in a dream
which has stopped being vigilant?
I can sleep at last only by the fact that
I want to awaken somebody else tenderly . . . We are, dear, we are! . . .
EURYDICE: Juliet! . . . A little girl! . . . I know:
she was little more than a year old when I was dying . . .
The trees bent the tops of the wind . . . Was it
astonishment or a scream? . . . I prayed
to God: for her, for you! I regretted
everything, I felt compassion . . . But
what in mercy is not pardon
would gladly interpret the foreign language of them both . . .
We are near blasphemy . . .
ORPHEUS: In this way the forest wanders in us and meets the trees.
EURYDICE: There was only a single tree and a little flower . . .
ORPHEUS: You know what kind . . . In a moment you will sniff it . . .
EURYDICE: She'll be starting to school soon, won't she?
ORPHEUS: In a month, darling . . .
EURYDICE: Does she have a primer? And a blackboard and a sponge
and a slate pencil?
And a school bag with a little mirror inside?
Come, we must hurry . . . Who is
with her? An aspen?
ORPHEUS: O my god . . . An aspen, wait,

why yes, Marfa, you know? Old Marfa . . . the nanny . . .
EURYDICE: Her? Is she still alive? Back then,
she had to have straw around her entire house,
like a house in which
a woman lies, moaning, yearning for silence.
ORPHEUS: Old Marfa is with her . . .
EURYDICE: You speak like this now, you
who have foretold the eclipse and diverted the currents of rivers?
But . . . I wonder if you know . . . if you know
that I died *gravid*
(you used to put it tenderly as if lost in thought)? . . .
ORPHEUS: Come, dear! . . . No! . . . I'll carry you
and kiss you . . . I'll kiss you and spoil you,
carry you, carry you, carry and kiss and spoil you . . .
– – – – – – – – – – – – – – –
– – – – – – – – – – – – – – –
But the poet does not know how to go on –
and people have stopped fearing . . ."

I understand you very well! I told Hamlet . . . For I
once *unwittingly* interrupted a couple in conversation,
they *never* returned to it . . .
They were husband and wife, both standing
in the gateway of the city of Daus . . .
Even though I could not immediately disappear
(I was so blinded by the force
of her beauty!), even today, after twenty years
I torture myself with remorse . . .

"Yes," said Hamlet, not listening to me,
"but woman's beauty and man's longing! . . .
It's possible that what took fright in him during the day
has the courage to go out into the night . . . But later,
the blind man guides himself using a hand gilded with moth killing
or with true lunacy . . .
But they've all kissed him:
the hangman, the waiter with poisoned wine,
or suicide . . .
Whoever *survives* will get used to it . . . Or will grow wise
and bite Judas' knee
and won't give a penny toward a burial stretcher for the poor . . .
You know the storm clouds sentenced to the executioner
who will shave their heads at Vulture Castle?
They greet each other in Latin and then it rains . . .

And the rain will wash it all away . . .
And again the sun and again the man, who
on a brewery-horse hunts skylarks with a dove
as well as the touch of not-his-woman.
A sea of boring semen from nones to vespers! . . ."

– – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

The window opened the wind, which sang:
  Little clouds are heaping, heaping,
  inspired by cosmic space,
  but when they release their drops,
  it only rains on a snail . . .

– – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

"I'd like to find a torrent which boils
in its waves the first cottage
built of tea bricks–
I'd like to find a river
which along its entire course
is without any cities . . . Simply it is always the fear
of being alone, being alone, being simply alone–
and so once again the woman ship and a man
who ignites his two lamps
under his lighthouse! . . .
And then the bewildering pause,
evoked by the entire score,
it is contemporaneity creating continuity,
a continuity that is vegetative and therefore dancing,
but grasped in such a way that a feeling for lies
takes precedence over a thought for truth–
and then touches of small thunders
(about a child's handful)
and touches precipitously oval and hairy
like the floor of a barber shop before it is swept,
touches unsure of all that threatens to remain–
and then coarseness negated by tenderness, gentleness in
    violence– –
one way or another, it is always our blood,
which reddened those who condemned us–
and it is the seed that conceived: *screened*,
and it is a fruit grown embittered as a thrown fist,
and it is melancholy

replacing a step with a staircase so quickly
that it leads to the abyss,
while somewhere spurned harmony waits
like a crying echo with a kerchief of fog in hand,
a hand which does not know whether the body's memory will
find the place
forgotten by the instincts of a soul
at a loss as to whether any hint
indicates a threat: to them, *those amateurs!!!*

Love! . . . It is daring before it lives,
and always destroys what gives it life . . . Upside down snow . . .
But snow under the heel of the angel of abstraction
does not melt . . . And since fate is not curious about ideals,
there is ruling and there is government . . . But love
should be what it will be . . . But it is love
that tells us that we are even now condemned . . .
Even absurdity is absurd . . .
We have no choice . . .

The inexplicability of a sentence
which we haven't understood in its darkness
sometimes bursts into so many sparks
that it blinds us . . . It is precisely *the real*
that is metaphysical . . . But lovers
don't like it when between a riddle
and the possibility of a solution
wit gently breaks off its own sharp points . . . Literal-minded,
they embrace and kiss and do not suspect
that danger too turns into habit and indifference.
For otherwise they'd have to die. To die perhaps
without the perfection of horror, but with utter certainty
during that barefoot quiet that comes to us
in a floral invitation
and says simply: enough!
Then we only glimpse each other—
without knowing if it is a matter of alternation or metamorphosis,
we must grant alternation and metamorphosis a deadline for
proffered hands and bowing,
so that meanwhile they can reshroud . . .

But a genuine lover won't make a truce with a portrait
and is unlikely to carry a cock to the Assyrians
from a word not yet begun, an uttered but unfinished indignation,

and an unstated joy . . . Every notion
is alluring . . . Even the notion of suicide . . .
May the night last, then,
in which a hardened harmony
repeats its rhythms so long
that fate alone rends its female squinting
in the twinkling of a destructive demon!
May the night last, in which everything is in disgrace
except art, which has long been damned
by the curiosity of hells and the indifference of this world!
May the night last, even if the lighthouse builder's stone
were to kill his son!
Let the night last, even if during subway construction
the first mid-summer fire-fly were put out!
Let the night last, in which a shooting star's broom
has long since swept away the fall of she-angels
from the Vatican gardens to the forest of souls at Waterloo!
The heart is the weight . . . Reason only the scales . . . Even in
posthumous innocence
we are tried again and again . . . So let the night last!

. . . . . .

NANCY SPERO: El Salvador ⟶

GEORGE EVANS

A VIEW FROM SPACE

Earth's a power without meaning
in the end.
We're locked here
in our visions.
I'm lost myself
over care for shelter it isn't
happiness but delight transfigured.

I wander sunlit esplanades and know
what's going on what's going on
is common knowledge, Earth is shrinking.

We afford insanity because we repair things,
our technology. When Newton dropped the apple
again, removing trees from the problem,
then apples, then landscape,
Earth was shrinking,
mysteries transforming—
science improves life leaving the conscience
untouched,
advances while the heart shrinks
and the heart shrinks quickly.

:

She was walking I was walking
into wind we reached the cliff
& downcoast rocks & water
seemed miles below we couldn't breathe
for wind the rocks were not as we are not
miles away, but here
and very close.

:

Stakes are small but magnified by fear.
You remember walking thinking the world's small

people are fools I can take it—forget it,
we mean to live in fear
of small things.

There's joy, then rose blush, freesia,
an exotic bird in the park
continents from home because someone
thought it understood love
leaving a cage open then a door:
lose their charm
& a man without a name from mythology,
nothing fancy to cloak him,
comes forth
with a pint of rum
into the sun
with whom no one will speak,
comes forth, sick of humor, sick of love—

I was young, he says,
and that is all he says.

:

I look along the coast
no one hears complaint
as no one hears breakers
after staying very long.

We must protect ourselves at every ocean.

With his toes out he played
the badinerie of Bach's Overture #2/B minor
in heavy rain by Powell Street station
his eyes glazed it was perfect
raging sweetly against exhaustion
of those dragging home it frightened me
that flute batting the rain.

:

Talent ravages the mind:
not enough/too much–

talent has no place
for a man,

a child's rule
is a fool's measure
for a man.

We pay for our spaces.

:

Walking,
stars fixed in the sky
I'm walking,
no place to live
without money

I think of Les Trois Frères
its sorcerer dancing
its animal/man dancing
on bare stone

where he lives in his cave
his house and grit my teeth

against culture & money

breaking my one crown.

:

Ripples swell to waves

over crab & whale

flute & sea pen merge,

hoards of homeless cross the road,

presidents
of my republic

surge:

this is the world from space the world
made small

where issues meet and wobble off
in one line,

pianos, flutes, bassoons, guitars,
unlikely mob,
converged –

killer, pimp, mother, immigrant, doctor, father,
loon
    all in one huddle

from this view

the dandelion a rose

the chipped plastic coffee table a fortress

tallest buildings spools

the greed in geography

smoothed

&

Earth a vision which has no power in the end,

no intellect, no fear in the end.

TWO POEMS

BREAK-DOWN

Talking until the words melted
and my mind went flat.
Then only a smile appeared
on my face, like a moon rising
up out of my shirt to replace
my intelligence, a silent brooding
lunar signal that only confused
my listener, who looked away,
into the face reflected back again
on the window. What consolation
is this, I wondered. She looks
only at her self, to herself,
and I am incapable of talking, anymore.

I picked up a hand and let it
fall into her hand, thinking
there were other tricks to communicating.
A foot eased its ridge of toes
toward her foot. I let my knee
move an inch to touch her own,
and I could not think of anything
else to do but press all these
centers onto hers, with no results.

Somewhere men were sitting down
to pitchers of ice water and papers,
as clerks and aides rushed behind
the chairs, whispering into old men's
ears, as everyone drew tensely forward
onto the green felt of the oval table,
to sort the ambitions of nations and
forestall a war. A bright bulb
flashed like a vision of utmost holocaust,
the disintegration of the world,

and all the eyes in unison winced,
then turned coldly to their foes again.

She was like a blown-down tree after
a hurricaine had churned the coast;
her ugly legs spraddled and uncomfortable,
her gnarled hands unable to hold mine;
her face like something pulled off
the earth, the underside of a bicycle seat,
without its upright pipe to screw down to,
to be connected with the earth again.
How I loathed and loved her at the
same time, wishing the war would start.

DESIRE

Eating by one's self
raises the question
of one's right to life.
Each fork of food appears
and tests the desire
to live on, before it is
placed on the tongue
and the food eaten.
It is an old nutritious
rosary that clinks
in the altogether silence
of the room. The monotonous
reassurance of each fork's
scrape on the plate,
the reduction of food
from its pattern there,
the breaking down of
an autonomous formation
outside one's own sphere
of process, that then
becomes the necessary
extension of continued being.
The eyes eat too, breaking
off a color and seizing it
in its neural teeth;
the ears are always swallowing
their gummy substances,
flanking the nervous brain.
My fingers creep steadily
down the table front,
like large desert spiders,
until they drop famished
to my pants, where the desire
to touch my hunger-core
and arouse it to its venomous
pitch is too powerful, and
I lay down the fork, close
my senses to the room, and
dream of absorbing the
independent fragrance of
a stranger through my skin,
bones and blood and shoes.

JOHN YAU

MICHAEL KESSLER'S DRAWINGS: GESTURE AS IMAGE

The drawings are done in charcoal on large sheets of paper stapled to the studio wall. Their height and width corresponds to the extreme limits of the artist's reach. The charcoal functions as an extension of the finger, hand, arm, and body. It records gestural rhythms and patterns. The approach is both spontaneous and ritualized. In overcoming the paper's resistant surface, the curvilinear marks dissolve it into light and space. Densities and darknesses are evolved through accumulation and repetition. If mass, contour, and surface are suggested, it is always through line.

Although the drawings originate in the artist's bodily gestures, the lines never become frenzied. Chaos goes uncourted. Control rather than freedom is the issue. Aggressiveness is transformed into a dance. Immediately apparent is a hallucinatory involvement and a cool detachment. Poised between these two poles, the drawings are both reflective and reflexive. The natural world is evoked, but not described. Line pretends to be something else, yet the allusion remains ambivalent. The duality engages us. Our perceptions shift between an observed world and a world made visible.

The end is not known in advance. Image is called forth by lines that are sensual and matter-of-fact. It can be unified or dispersed. It can emanate from a central, dominating shape or spread in different directions across the paper, like a force field of varying intensities. The realm inhabited by these gracefully athletic, gestural traces is fluid and abstract.

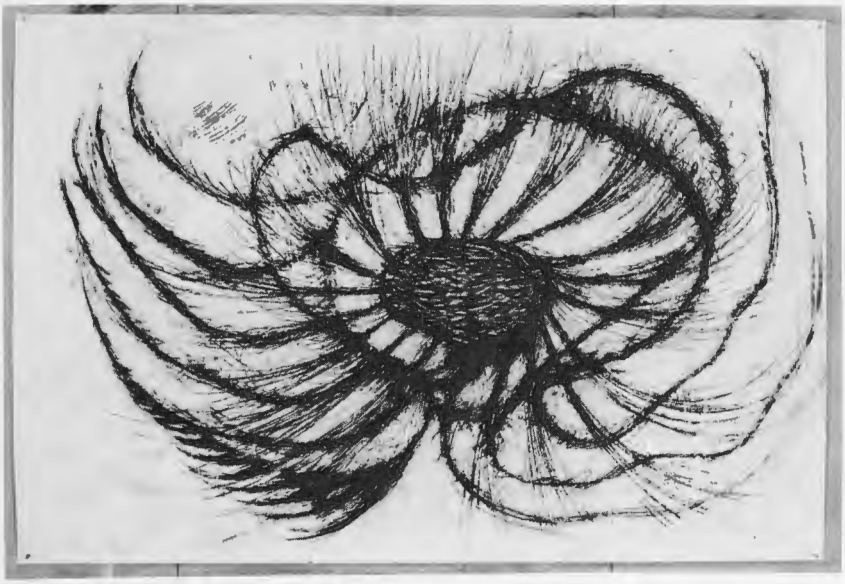
MICHAEL KESSLER

FIVE DRAWINGS

ESCAPED
Charcoal on paper / 5' x 7' / 1984

Photos and artwork courtesy of: Wolff Gallery, New York City

NAP
Charcoal on paper / 5' x 7' / 1984



STRAINED
Charcoal on paper / 5' x 7' / 1985

PRAYER
Charcoal on paper / 7' x 5' / 1985

EARTH STRIKE
Charcoal on paper / 7' x 5' / 1984

PAPER TIGERS

T.

The Maharajah of Rewa, according to his English Adviser, had his own method of hunting tiger:

> He found the easiest way to bag tigers was to take with him a book and a monkey on a long string. When seated in the *machan* [a platform in the trees] he would release the monkey, who immediately climbed into the top branches. He would then give the signal for the beat to start and settle down to read. As soon as the tiger approached the monkey would spot him and give the cough with which all monkeys warn the jungle folk that "Sher Khan" the tiger is on the prowl. His Highness would then quickly put down his book and pick up the rifle.

At the turning of a page, the apparition of a tiger:

Y.

Berggasse 19, March 10, 1933: H.D., one of the last patients of Freud, records her sessions with the Professor:

> Curiously in fantasy I think of a tiger. Myself as a tiger? This tiger may pounce out. Suppose it should attack the frail and delicate old Professor? Do I fear my own terrors of the present situation, the lurking "beast" may or may not destroy him? I mention this tiger as a past nursery fantasy. Suppose it should actually materialize? The Professor says, "I have my protector."
>
> He indicates Yofi, the little lioness curled at his feet.

And a few days later:

> I spoke again of our toy animals and he reminded me of my tiger fantasy. Wasn't there a story, "the woman and the tiger," he asked. I remembered "The Lady or the Tiger."

G.

A King invents a peculiar system of justice: The accused is placed in a large arena before the entire populace and must open one of two identical doors. Behind one, a tiger, which will leap out and tear the man to pieces, establishing his guilt. Behind the other, a lady "most suitable to

his years and station," whom he must immediately marry as a reward for his innocence. ("It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection. The King allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward.") The accused, then, must "open either [door] he pleased, without having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married."

As might be expected, the King had a daughter, and she falls in love with a handsome commoner. Learning of this transgression, the King declares that the boy must be sent to the arena. For one door, the most ferocious tiger in the land is found; for the other, the most beautiful maiden—more beautiful, in fact, than the King's own daughter.

Before the trial, the wily daughter discovers the secret of the doors, and as the boy enters the arena she signals him with her right hand. He immediately opens the right door . . . But which would be worse for this "hot-blooded semi-barbaric princess": to see her beloved ripped to shreds, or happily married to a woman more lovely than she? What was the meaning of her sign? Or, as the story ends: "Which came out of the opened door—the lady, or the tiger?"

E.

Frank Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" first published in *The Century Magazine* in 1882, quickly became an international obsession. At the time inconclusive endings were vexatious, not modern, and for the twenty years until his death Stockton was besieged with solutions, sequels and threats. Among the latter, Rudyard Kipling subjected Stockton to a bit of impeccable Raj ragging, as reported by the San Francisco *Wave* in 1896:

> Stockton and Kipling met at an author's reception, and after some preliminary talk, the former remarked: "By the way, Kipling, I'm thinking of going over to India some day myself." "Do so, my dear fellow," replied Mr. Kipling, with suspicious warmth of cordiality. "Come as soon as ever you can! And, by the way, do you know what we'll do when we get you out there, away from your friends and family? Well, the first thing will be to lure you out into the jungle and have you seized and bound by our trusty wallahs. Then we'll lay you on your back and have one of our very biggest elephants stand over you and poise his ample forefoot directly over your head. Then I'll say in my most insinuating tones, 'Come now, Stockton, which was it—The Lady or the Tiger?'. . ."

And Mrs. Stockton recorded this ludicrous scene in her diary:

> Miss Evans, our niece, wrote to us that a missionary who was visiting her mission station among the Karens [a tribe in northeast Burma], told her she had just come from a distant wild tribe of Karens occasionally visited by

missionaries and to her surprise was immediately asked by them if she knew who came out the door, The Lady or the Tiger? Her explanation of it was that some former visitor had read to them this story as suited to their fancy; and as she had just come from the outside world they supposed she could tell the end of it.

Men generally favored the lady, women the tiger. An exception was Robert Browning, who declared he had "no hesitation in supposing that such a princess, under such circumstances, would direct her lover to the tiger's door." In fact, Freud's slip was to the point: it is an *and*, not an *or*, proposition. The choice between lady or tiger, "devoured or married," was to its readers hardly a choice at all. As one W.S. Hopson of San Francisco wrote in 1895:

When my wife flies into a passion,
And her anger waxes wroth,
I think of the Lady and the Tiger,
and sigh that I chose them both.

R.

A few years after Stockton's death, Elinor Glyn's *Three Weeks* (1907) was the steamy bestseller of its day, its success due largely to its famous seduction scene on a tiger-skin rug:

Paul entered from the terrace. And the loveliest sight of all, in front of the fire, stretched at full length, was his tiger and on him—also at full length—reclined the lady . . .

"No! You mustn't come near me, Paul . . . Not yet. You brought me the tiger. Ah that was good! My beautiful tiger!" And she gave a movement like a snake, of joy to feel its fur under her, while she stretched out her hands and caressed the creature where the hair turned white and black at the side, and was deep and soft.

"Beautiful one! Beautiful one!" she purred. "And I know all your feelings and your passions, and now I have got your skin—for the joy of my skin." And she quivered again with a movement of a snake.

Alas, tiger's fur is short and coarse, and would make for an itchy tryst. But Glyn's book effectively played on the fusion of lady and tiger in the popular imagination. It also inspired this piece of anonymous doggerel (and mnemonic guide to proper pronunciation):

Would you like to sin
with Elinor Glyn
on a tiger skin?
Or would you prefer
to err
with her
on some other fur?

Tiger, woman, passion. Glyn's sin comes out of ancient tradition, for the tiger has always been first female, and later male.

The earliest recorded tigers in the West were those presented to Seleuces I (312-280). (Alexander of course had seen tigers in Persia.) In Latin poetry *tigris* is always feminine (the word means "arrow," and was applied to the swiftness of the animal and the river); in Roman art tigresses are nearly always portrayed. Female tiger is often paired with male lion, much as Freud's "lioness" Yofi checks H.D.'s tiger. Bacchus' chariot was drawn by such a pair. It is a distinction Keats articulates in "Hyperion" as "tiger-passioned, lion-thoughted." (Similarly, the Brontes' cats were named "Tiger" and "Keeper.") As late as the 18th century it was believed that the way to capture a tiger cub—the only way to get a tiger for one's menagerie—was the procedure first described by Claudian nearly 2000 years before: steal the cub and, with the tiger in pursuit, scatter mirrors in her path; her female vanity is such that she will gaze fondly in the mirror and forget about the baby.

In China the tiger was originally *yin*: associated with the underworld, and with the West (where the sun enters the underworld). In the *feng-shui* system of geomancy, it is paired with the *yang* green dragon. (The Buddhists would later reverse the genders of the tiger/green dragon pair—stressing the tiger's *yang* nobility, and pointing out, quite correctly, that tigers wear the character for "king," *wang* 王 on their foreheads.) Wordsworth's description (in *The Prelude*) of Jacobin Paris as "Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam" may owe something to Virgil's characterization of Rome as "a wilderness of tigers." But both are identical to the stock Chinese metaphor for a corrupt and sick society: a tiger (*yin*) in a bamboo grove (*yang*), the dark within the light.

Most important is the Chinese tiger-monster, the *tao tie* ("the glutton") which is prominent as early as the Shang dynasty. The *tao tie* is a devourer, and almost always appears in funerary art; sometimes the burial urn itself is in the shape of a tiger. It is the earth eating the dead to provide nourishment for the living—much as the Greek word *sarcophagus* means "to eat flesh." (In the pre-Columbian Americas where there were no tigers, the jaguar was its exact equivalent: an earth-image paired in Mesoamerica with the sky-symbol of the feathered serpent, in South America commonly portrayed in burial urns. The whole city of Cuzco was originally laid out in the form of a jaguar—a kind of living necropolis, *polis* as affirmation of death and life.)

Although frequent in the early Harappan art of the Indus Valley, the tiger is rarely visible as an icon in India until its masculinization in Mughal

times—quite strange, considering that Hinduism tended to find metaphysical uses for nearly every indigenous thing. In Hindu iconography it appears only occasionally as the vehicle for the Durga, the terrifying destroyer-goddess. There are, for example, no tigers in Vidyakara's *Treasury* (the great Sanskrit poetry anthology) where so much of Indian life is represented. But among the jungle tribes the tiger was an active presence as devouring mother, fecund mother. "In Akola," writes William Crooke in 1894, "the gardeners are unwilling to inform the sportsmen of the whereabouts of a tiger which may have taken up quarters in their plantation, for they have a superstition that a garden plot loses its fertility from the moment one of these animals is killed." And among the Gonds, wedding ceremonies were marked by the appearance of "two demoniacs possessed by Bagheswar, the tiger god," who "fell ravenously on a bleating kid, and gnawed it with their teeth till it expired."

Y.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, explicating one of her own poems, writes:

> In "Crowbar," the whole argument comes to the poised end in the doubling of two words: *hungry* and *angry* which grasp towards the odd *-ngry* ending they hold in common. *Hungry* meant complicit with the psychic cultural construction of beautiful, seductive and seduced women; *angry* meant critical of the same.

G.

Hungry woman, angry woman: destroyer, devourer, nurturer: tiger images all. It is curious in this context to read Emily Dickinson's two enigmatic poems on tigers:

566

A Dying Tiger—moaned for Drink—
I hunted all the Sand—
I caught the Dripping of a Rock
And bore it in my Hand—

His Mighty Balls— in death were thick—
But searching— I could see
A Vision on the Retina
Of Water— and of me—

'Twas not my blame— who sped too slow—
'Twas not his blame— who died
While I was reaching him—
But 'twas— the fact that he was dead—

872

As the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies
As the Vultures teased
Forces the Broods in lonely Valleys
As the Tiger eased

By but a Crumb of Blood, fasts Scarlet
Till he meet a Man
Dainty adorned with Veins and Tissues
And partakes— his Tongue

Cooled by the Morsel for a moment
Grows a fiercer thing
Till he esteem his Dates and Cocoa
A Nutrition mean

I, of a finer Famine
Deem my Supper dry
For but a berry of Domingo
And a Torrid Eye.

E.

There are no tigers in the Bible, and in the absence of a fixed iconography, the West had to invent its allegorical tiger. Shakespeare compares the murderous Queen Margaret (in *Henry VI Part 3*) to a tiger, and has Romeo express his rage in *yin* imagery:

The time and my intents are savage-wild,
More fierce and more inexorable far
Than empty tigers or the roaring sea.

But he also uses the tiger in its now-familiar masculine role: symbol of military valor. (Almost all the armies of the world are decked with tiger images.) Henry the Fifth, in his "Once more unto the breach, dear friends" speech:

But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger:
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favored rage;
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect . . .
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
To his full height! On, on you noble English . . .

The Western image of the tiger was permanently altered in the 18th century by the reign of the Mughal prince Tipu Sultan (1750-1799), the self-styled Tiger of Mysore and a perfect incarnation of the Orientalist nightmare of the Eastern despot.

A stern moralist, Tipu abolished polyandry and instituted his version of Koranic law. He changed the calendar and all weights and measures; he renamed all the cities and the towns. He sponsored the arts and commercial enterprises, reformed every detail of daily existence from the way the markets ran to the way crops were planted and gathered. He kept a book of his dreams. At night he slept on the floor on a coarse piece of canvas, and each morning he ate the brains of male sparrows for breakfast.

He commanded an army of 140,000, sworn to wipe out the British. Prisoners were subjected to particularly grotesque torture: boiling oil, special devices for removing noses and upper lips. In his most brilliantly insidious punishment the enemy was turned into the Other: British soldiers were forced to cut off their foreskins and eat them.

He was also, in his mind, a tiger. His throne was mounted on a full-size gilded tiger with rock-crystal eyes and teeth; its finials were tiger-heads set with rubies and diamonds; its canopy was tiger-striped with hammered gold. His soldiers dressed in tiger-patterned uniforms and kept their prisoners in tiger cages until it was time for them to be thrown to the tigers. Their cannons had tiger breech-blocks, their mortars were in the shape of tigers, their rifles had tiger-headed stocks and hammers, their swords were engraved with tigers or forged in a striped blend of metals. Live tigers were chained to the palace doors. Tipu's handkerchiefs were striped; his banner read "The Tiger is God."

All this, to put it mildly, made quite an impression in the West. The newspapers were full of Tipu: if an elderly servant was murdered in a siege, she was immediately transformed into 400 beautiful British virgins throwing themselves on swords rather than face the ravishment of Tipu's troops. In London, Tipu plays were a permanent attraction for 30 years. (The first, *Tippoo Sahib, or British Valour in India* began running at Covent Garden on June 1, 1791. It was followed the next year by *Tippoo Sultan, or the Siege of Bangalore.*) When Tipu was finally slain and his capital Seringpatam captured by the British in 1798, it was cause for national celebration. Robert Ker Porter's 120-foot-long painting, "The Storming of Seringpatam," was mounted on the stage of the Lyceum and the crowds paid a shilling each to view the great scene. Wilkie Collins in 1868 added an aura to his Moonstone by having it come from the plunder of Seringpatam, and as late as 1898 Sir Henry Newbolt had a popular schlock epic poem on Tipu's defeat.

The tiger, then, took on a fearful androgyny: a masculine military ferocity within a dark Eastern feminine Other. The tiger was, in the words of Capt. Williamson's *Oriental Sports*, "the mottled object of detestation": an obstacle to progress, everything that was not white, Western, male, good. Its literal and metaphorical vanquishing became a British obsession. For a century boys' stories were full of man-eating tigers. With a short leap, the word "man-eater" was soon applied to women.

T.

Blake's "tyger," according to the exegetes, stands for wrath, revolution, untamed energy and beauty, the romantic revolt of imagination against reason. Its direction is East—contrary to the Chinese, but obvious for a Westerner. It is associated with fire and smoke: "burning bright," roaming "in the redounding smoke in forests of affliction," "blinded by the smoke" issuing from "the wild furies" of its own brain. Numerous critics have pointed out that "The Tyger" of *Songs of Experience* was written in 1793, during the French Revolution. But it was also a time when the papers and theaters were crazy with tales of Tipu.

Did Blake ever see a real tiger? The Tower of London menagerie had been opened to the public in the middle of the century (price of admission: three ha'pennies or one dead dog or cat) and it frequently featured tigers. A new specimen was acquired in 1791. And when Blake lived at Fountain Court, the Strand, he could have strolled over to Pidcock's Exhibition of Wild Beasts, where tigers were often on display.

Pidcock and Blake form two sides of a tiger triangle: the third is George Stubbs, the first English painter of tigers. His "The Tyger," as Kathleen Raine points out in *Blake and the Tradition*, was first exhibited at the Society of Artists of Great Britain in 1769, at the same time and in the same building where the 12-year-old William Blake was studying drawing at Pars' school. (It was, by the way, Pidcock who sold Stubbs the dead tiger which the artist used for his last work, which bore the matchless title *The Comparative Anatomy of Humans, Chickens & Tigers.*)

Raine remarks on the effect that the painted tiger must have had on the boy Blake. She does not consider, however, the painting itself: Stubbs' "tyger," like all the tigers he painted, is not an icon of untamed energy, but rather a recumbent, noble but cuddly, large cat. (In contrast, his lions are always portrayed committing acts of terror in a storm-tossed landscape—as in the famous "Horse Attacked by a Lion," now at Yale; a motif Stubbs copied from Roman statuary, which was itself a copy from Scythian art.) And when Blake came to illustrate his "The Tyger" the animal was so oddly passive and sweet, almost smiling, that some friends complained, Shakespeare's hard-favored rage had been disguised by fair nature.

There is no doubt that Blake associated tigers with wrath and revolu-

tion, but it is interesting that Blake drew his physical image from Stubbs' painting and the half-dead animals in the local cages – surely he could have imagined it otherwise. (Consider the terror of his flea.) Or is Blake's (and Stubbs') tyger meant to demonstrate the possibilities latent beneath a passive exterior, as yogis traditionally sat immobile on tiger-skin mats, as the men of the Industrialized West saw women: a dormant volcano? Is the tyger's blank smile its most fearful symmetry?

Y.

It is quite probable that Blake had heard of the death of Sir Hector Munro's son, the most famous tiger-kills-Englishman story of the century. This account appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in July 1793, the year "The Tyger" was composed:

> To describe the aweful, horrid and lamentable accident I have been an eye witness of, is impossible. Yesterday morning Mr Downey, of the [East India] Company's troops, Lieut. Pyefinch, poor Mr Munro and myself went on-shore on Saugor Island to shoot deer. We saw innumerable tracks of tigers and deer, but still we were induced to pursue our sport, and did the whole day. At about halfpast three we sat down on the edge of the jungle, to eat some cold meat sent us from the ship, and had just commenced our meal, when Mr Pyefinch and a black servant told us there was a fine deer within six yards of us. Mr Downey and myself immediately jumped up to take our guns; mine was the nearest, and I had just laid hold of it when I heard a roar, like thunder, and saw an immense tiger spring on the unfortunate Munro, who was sitting down. In a moment, his head was in the beast's mouth, and he rushed into the jungle with him, with as much ease as I could lift a kitten, tearing through the thickest bushes and trees, everything yielding to his monstrous strength. The agonies of horror, regret, and, I must say fear (for there were two tigers, male and female) rushed on me at once. The only effort I could make was to fire at him, though the poor youth was still in his mouth. I relied partly on Providence, partly on my own aim, and fired a musket. I saw the tiger stagger and agitated, and cried out so immediately. Mr Downey then fired two shots and I one more. We retired from the jungle, and, a few minutes after, Mr Munro came up to us, all over blood, and fell. We took him on our backs to the boat, and got every medical assistance for him from the *Valentine* East India Main, which lay at anchor near the Island, but in vain. He lived twenty four hours in the extreme torture; his head and skull were torn and broke in pieces, and he was wounded by the claws all over the neck and shoulders; but it was better to take him away, though irrecoverable than leave him to be devoured limb by limb. We have just read the funeral service over the body, and committed it to the deep. He was an amiable and promising youth. I must observe, there was a large fire blazing close to us, composed of ten or a dozen whole trees; I made it myself, on purpose to keep the tigers off, as I had always heard it would. There were eight or ten of the natives about

us; many shots had been fired at the place, and much noise and laughing at the time; but this ferocious animal disregarded all. The human mind cannot form an idea of the scene; it turned my very soul within me. The beast was about four and a half feet high, and nine long. His head appeared as large as an ox's, his eyes darting fire, and his roar, when he first seized his prey, will never be out of my recollection. We had scarcely pushed our boats from the shore when the tigress made her appearance, raging mad almost, and remained on the sand as long as the distance would allow me to see her.

This scene of tigress, fire and the humanly unthinkable may have partially inspired Blake. It did most certainly inspire Tipu Sultan. Sir Hector, the boy's father (and ancestor of H.H. Munro, "Saki") was the arch-enemy of Tipu's father, Haidar Ali. At the news of the boy's death—which Tipu gleefully interpreted as a sign that his fellow tigers were joining the struggle against the British—he ordered the construction of a large mechanical toy, now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, to commemorate the event. It is a lifesize wooden tiger crouched on a prone English soldier; wound up, the toy, it is said, simultaneously emits roars and hideous groans. Keats, in "The Cap and Bells," called it the "Man-Tiger-Organ."

G.

After the fall of Seringpatam, tiger-killing became the standard measure in India of a Britisher's valor and innate superiority. And after the Empire forced peaceful co-existence onto the normally warring princely states, the Maharajahs could only display their power and manhood in British terms. No visit to a palace by a distinguished foreigner was complete without a tiger hunt. That the guest would be neither endangered nor disappointed, the tigers were often drugged beforehand with opium-laced meat to ensure a safe and unerring shot.

George Yule of the Bengal Civil Service killed 400 then stopped counting. Colonel Rice killed 93 in four years. Montague Gerard killed 227. The Maharajah of Surguja killed 1,150. The Maharajah Scindia killed at least 700. The guests of the Maharajah Scindia killed at least 200. The Maharajah of Gauripiur killed 500 then stopped counting.

As early as 1827, one Capt. Mundy could write, with unintentional irony:

Thus in the space of about two hours, and within sight of the camp, we found and slew three tigers, a piece of good fortune rarely to be met with in these modern times, when the spread of cultivation, and the zeal of the English sportsmen have almost exterminated the breed of these animals.

E.

The Bali tiger: last seen in 1937, *extinct.*

The Caspian tiger:	last seen in 1957, *extinct.*
The Java tiger:	3-5 left.
The Sumatra tiger:	800 left.
The Siberian tiger:	200 left in the U.S.S.R.
	less than 100 left in China and the Koreas.
The Chinese tiger:	"very few" left.
The Indo-Chinese tiger:	1,125 left, "declining rapidly."
The Indian tiger:	1,827 left in India.

(Estimated population c. 1900 of the Indian tiger in India: 40,000.)

Cleansed, the tiger appears in Eliot's "Gerontion" as Christ.

R.

Tigers eat men only when they are starving, or are too old or sick to catch more elusive prey. In parts of India, it is believed that man-eating tigers are not tigers at all, but men who have transformed themselves into tigers to commit, for their purposes, masked acts of murder. These counterfeit tigers, the man-eaters, are recognizable to the villagers, as they would have been to Freud: they have no tails.

[1985]

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

THE EXCAVATION OF ARTAUD

Shaman of obsession—I said at his tomb—
excavated in electricity, opened between
anus and sex. In the Australian outback of the soul,
3 dead men are fingering your anesthetized root support
shining like a chain of sputtering lights, for the key to creation,
between the bone they've drawn out and your bone they so desire.

Priest of lethal phallic rites, of sparkings
in foetid material, of remaining in antithesis
with no hope of synthesis, priest of a genuine melee—
3 dead men are fingering your Muladhara Chakra, your amphimixis,
as if, under the Christian gunk that clogged your focus,
they could plug into your triangle and its twisting tongue of flame.

Pariah in silence, coprophilially
squatting in the corner of your cell for years,
sealed open, who only came when called by your mother's name—
repressing their way in, to the point of anal cancer,
3 dead men, licking your electro-shock induced Bardo, have found
your atomic glue, the Kundalini compost they must eat to speak.

O shaman, from having been so masterfully plundered!
O priest, from having been fixed in antithesis!
O pariah, from having been so desired by the dead!

[1984]

SAUL YURKIEVICH

FOUR POEMS

Tr. from the Spanish by Cola Franzen

I MYSELF

I knew that the die
of bone was my self
and posed the impenetrable
question
the fickle ring
fell with its diamond
the mask
hanging on the wall
walks out
it has one living
eye

They force me to play. I don't know the rules. I draw the highest card. Everything consists in prolonging the game. One always loses.

SENTENCE

doesn't read what he should
thinks what he shouldn't
doesn't say what he should
writes what he shouldn't

shouldn't read
shouldn't think
shouldn't speak
shouldn't write

should read what he should
should think what he should
should say what he should
should write what he should

what he shouldn't do is read
what he shouldn't do is think
what he shouldn't do is speak
what he shouldn't do is write

doesn't live as he should
lives but shouldn't
shouldn't live

EDIFICE DEDICATED TO SILENCE

change of simulacrum
in his theatre constructed
in the air
changes features quickchange of clothes
shadows
usually dresses
as beautiful bundle
and will continue
ringing changes
in this artful dream
shadows
seals
in tombs of foam
being no longer his what might have been
the apparent be it the attempt
that doesn't become as it may remains
remains without becoming
is personae
feigns muteness voices
and garrulous silence
in his vowels tints entice
mint belies

also his I restrospective
(the broad channel of this running stream)
his other successors
the hours the days are eroding
his present
the days the years are corroding
it's always an other
volatility acknowledged
not one is
is nobody
without center I
a galaxy
various satires and different tints
with as many faces as
glances they might ferret it out
if we were that one
other we you(others) he anotherother
(such work time may not consume)
of our vanity
tell it the wind
where do we stand
so without so defenseless
nothing gives being gives not
(I discover. I see a world. Small thing it has been)
which fortune her
self hatches for us
lies
cipher that may be spoken
slogan that may be read
in his theatre
the dream
author of impersonations
masquerade
relics remain
of disguises
they are feathers
(trace in the face
death mask)
whoever ignores it errs greatly
they inspect us
because every tongue denounces
every ear
our theatre
pageantry

even of stones
illusory
condemned to

this that I will guarantee you
brief cinder
every spectacle
will be
ensnared your eyes
by painting
conspicuous mirror
persisting
in
painting the fields and gilding the grain
in portraying
specular spectator
specter of the speculum
theatre treats twists
on stage tricks
everybody
role fits
this teratology everybody
gratuitous role
in front of the curtain
(front curtain)
we parley
now of paladins now of specters
going topsy-turvy playing tricks
palace and pallium
mountain of muses now park for lovers
that in bundles of paper and papier mâché
are an orchestra of the vain
various mirages
are an orchestra of deals
are an orchestra of the vacuous syllogisms
shameless mask masque
without aspect
(reason shipwrecked among reefs)
theatre:
reason for being
none

From: *Rimbomba* (Pamplona, Spain, 1978), and *Acaso Acoso* (Valencia, Spain, 1982).

YOU PLACE

your long white hand behind your ear and caress a spot as if it is
your sex and suddenly your body is another alphabet

a turned away malicious presence stone by Noguchi with lines
cool flesh is there any substitute now take both hands

sensuousness is not any long apparent no longer a preumbra
you are a white shadow now you are a cone fixed

by coiling arms getting longer pulled through clavicals like
socks

why am I writing this in springtime when wind is starting
when everything is broken into points, feminine

a litter how well
those French gothics understood limb by limb that someone
pulls lines like whiplash, throwness and falseness

I sit by the college walls dreaming of chestnuts
clouds carry a load of quicklime they are little blue

wheelbarrows on a shelf

2.

In drawing this time I focus on the sheets turning points like
Klan members triangles Phillip Guston's drawings
your foot my foot arms elbows if there is love inside it is birds
caught under a pillow case can we signal the world no
they are numb the world is a numb beachgrove reduction
reduction even images grow schematic and dominate all those
courses hidden light indirect you get me under the skin
throwing the self automatically forward and eracing the mocking
bird singing at night convulsed head back in my ear

3.

now the sea is a blue beast snake spittle garbage multiplicity of drives and capacities thoughts smoothed like a computer drawing unexpectedly the key turns a royal blue vault reticent novels by Holderlin sticky essence of white rhodedendron what Rilke or Rodin meant sea never know in abrasion clouds torching their breaths.

4.

Extenuation is no time at all a tin sun shaking on a statue's breast she leaned close to me when I lost him told me a German story about touching a fawn made of chalk gift she said meaning poison and that meaning fish

did you say hello the voice musical as shells made to float on blue paper like kites

FIVE POEMS

THE WORLD

Music has not been invented yet.
Hollow horns of tree stumps
open to wind for grief.
Poetry is talking in mumbles &
in shallow streams whose waters
etch soft rock with short lines,
cries against torture. What lies
inbetween pulses with irregular
waves where earth wanders,
waveless, caught like a bird
under cat's paw. Carpets
of snow blind the valley & hoist
the mountain to extremes of a plan
seen as noble or perverse, depending on the
particular love for what is strange,
desirable. The past haunts, whines
among the falling ripe plums, blackened by
frost and I am talking, talking, talking
about war: the ineradicable gest,
spearpoint of star lanced wind come down
where wolves bed, seeking remission,
howling softly, recognizing this great &
bawdy promised land: this patchwork
of comings & goings, faithful only to
bare branches & cicada hum from belowground,
signifying some life exists in spite of our
depth of eventuality.

IMAGINE

Townies call me Indian, Jew, Buddha-ist.
No red rock jewel mountain stronghold here.

That's my house . . . the one snow
is still falling on
though legally it's Spring.
Busted window admits it & warped doorframe
opens the door to wind during night,
an invitation I cannot refuse to attend to.
Rednecks drive up in second gear, whining, on their
6-packs, rifles hung upside down on racks
up rear window of their Dodge RAM. Knock loudly
on the door, it opens, & ask me do I have any
cigarettes to sell. Shuffling inside their
plaids like shy bears.
Midnight.
A change from chanting sutras, to be sure.
I speak very plainly because my terror is cautious.
We all know what really
inside a woman moves for pleasure. I send my
trembling to a moon not visible. A woman must learn
to pull against gravity without obstructing
the flow of her own nature, of space
in which all
things have equal
dominion.
I know their faces, have watched them lurch
at the back of town meeting. I know what
they signify.
But this pain we share I would not.
We want some of your poetry, one from the truck calls.
I say Imagine
and shut the door.

ISLAND

it doesn't think of itself
as being remote, it is
the promised earth, the song
that drove Circe mad long before
you-know-who, pig man
beachd on her acorn stubbled shore
seeing in her eyes his burning ship

& in her thin body the straits
through which he could escape
himself once again. but on
that island no man is one.

SUKHAVATI

when a Buddhist dies her name is written
with a perfect hand on silk or parchment
& set like a banner at the foot of the shrine

faced with their own impermanence
the sangha sits in meditation
just breathing, backs erect, eyes open

in meditation until a volunteer reads aloud
her poetry or someone else's
then strikes a match off flint
& lifts her name back to the flame
from which it arose, the voice of calm zero

---

for Nancy Harrison, who had Lupus and could not go into the sun until she died
—mangalam—

BEES . . . . . HONEY

the man & woman are not struggling
though clearly he has her by the hands
behind her dense black lacquered hair
only a slim ;each edge of pillow
is it Kutani porcelain
visible at corner atop tatami

perhaps they are weaving gold from straw

her lips too red
his tongue an exaggeration, telling us
fertility breeds sorrow
& possibly, wisdom.
oh not my body on the bed with you
& my mind at Kabuki.
it is the blank radiance of koto wind
outranks both silk & cotton sleeve
where the mind has flung itself, breathlessly.

the man's intent catches our breath
a snowlflutter where stiffly among wrappings
that only partially conceal
the citrine flush of her bellyflesh
a nightingale throbs its song.

peony fragrance mingles
with salt. her mingei eyes, her delicate fingers.
how like the full
moon, pulling his
long house to earth.

geisha behind paper walls plum blossoms
kneel, write lovepoems to the emperor
who rarely ornaments his sword with flowers
though it is rumored he is fringed with a thousand
million bees. perhaps
they are weaving straw from gold.

history tells us only the lie of it, only glimpse
unfolding not the whole pattern.

if men did not rule
this world which one
would they think up?

ARKADII DRAGOMOSHCHENKO

FIVE POEMS

(Tr. from the Russian by Lyn Hejinian and Michael Molnar)

ACCIDIA

what is there to do—go
what are they doing—going
(from exercises)

for Lin Khedzhinyan

1. if mercury, in clots, hardens into inverted ice, and heat encountering needles of clairvoyance soaks into the escaping flutter of a cloth

it follows
one must break
the mirror
of language The broken mirror is a bad sign. One morning in summer I was awakened by an inhuman howling: my mother was crying. My grandfather had hanged himself.

The seething day formed in its own heat. That summer swarms of butterflies bustled above the vegetable gardens. In the arabian skulls of poppies their rustling was confused. Everything begins with an error of vision, with the disintegration of the thing affixed to its inevitable unity (Learn by dreaming, identify subjects and things. such is coupling.)

Arkadii Dragomoshchenko was brought up in Vinnitsa in the Ukraine and now lives in Leningrad. He is a member of *Club 81*, an officially recognized group of 'unofficial' writers in Leningrad who are allowed to hold readings and discussions and to negotiate—so far unsuccessfully—for publication of their work. The club does not constitute a movement or school, its members have no poetics or approach in common. In the largely traditionalist atmosphere of Leningrad poetry (both official and unofficial), Dragomoshchenko's work is experienced as unsettling, formally and thematically indeterminable. Where clarity is valued, an oblique angle of vision is likely to be suspect; all the more so poetry that is formed out of the refractions of expression as perception. In the Soviet Union Dragomoshchenko's poetry has until now only appeared in samizdat. These are the first translations to be published.
—M.M.

Poppyseed and butterflies.
Redhot ground.
Mint growing from the collarbones.

Links of errors compose themselves into zones of green – not
immortality.
and next the tan ruins of the rings stages of the destruction
of the leaf, the ladder leading from the alternation of things.
Describing
the wind rose, its rays on forty pages of descent, it's possible to
seek out the scabbed gesture, if the snow is eaten away by the
dream.
The deposits of color on places where the light is fused with
mercury.

The street he walked down was like a riverbed or the
ancient
counting out of proportions and correspondences. the narrow path of
a
face. a streetlight in darkening swirls of air. the head thrown back
to see the faded egypt of a butterfly. you know how cheese ripens in
the darkness of a low barn, in the stone of matter.
The drowsing of the chrysolite is simple.
Names
are burdened with designation. drowsiness, woodenness, through
which
perception seeps. Speak.
But. Should it stop?
Masonry, crumbling from the wall, flows to the end.

Bands of yellow wash quickly over the shoals of sunset.
Or azure even coals in which children are eagerly bathing,
like angels in wild flames, having bitten
the apple of laughter. Jeder Engel ist lächerlich.
An afternoon.

Every stalk loses its significance at night eternity and green
spread out bluegray in the sandstone above the springs Crete
and Crimea – one bitter clay for a porous jug – speech
rids itself of its liquid
in the sweep of the measured ring
foam blown from Crete the throat parallels of rain
the ditches are seams the snail of the cyclone imitates the

shivering of heat in ice inverted inside out

then absolute blackness.

Or the balance of a cloud.
The anticipation of a trap decays in it, like baskets in the hands of fishermen, when they weave them quickly, with skill, from damp willow branches, sweet as hair to the overcast morning water.
Descent of the page.
Steel splash of fish. The cold morning was unavoidable—
sunrise of plastic bags in the kitchen. water from the tap.
long-decaying roses.

2. first an error of vision. unconvincing invocations of hair.
the war lasts 37 years signifying a temporary armistice, after which a new abduction of Persephone, yet another in a continuing series.
a failed event. "c" doesn't meet in a circle, a congruent "s", the space between them a plane.
walking down the street he turns. inside him sways a growing, terribly slow god. reaching the end he gathers himself as if to leap and inevitably (this is said with absurd delight) something happens. otherwise would it be worth living, they ask. he turns, twisting with difficulty, turning the axis of his back; thus the next line straightens itself out of despair

or desire, a lie growing with delicate patience, suffocating in the bright light, in the grass waste. without any hurry enumerate the
ones
which await destruction voluptuously in neighboring death

or the milk tears of Klee

a hound licking a smooth bone howling on a scrap heap of
burning rubber

I didn't dream of a white jet bomber

and a daughter dreamed up by the wind, passing from the body of a
sister
into the blood of a wife, of iron, of an empress, or into the silver hemorrhaging of leprosy—it would seem that this is enough for a
dream;
too much! in other words, to make a long story short (no bugs

remain
when the building burns) I crunched the vertebrae of my neck under
a
wreath of guffaws, a massive white hoop.

crowns of walnut trees
of fading maples
wormeaten purple of the hills

a million yellow lions are ready to exit from the intersecting
eyelashes of the sunset
falling so heavily from sunrise to the west that you forget the song
of those who touch the palate with expired tongue and break the
swinging
of the thread
from which someone doesn't know how to live without
another.
The habit of company, the context of living. Life. Or, on the
contrary:
casually sinking into the night like children in the blue strewn with
coals (as for its length, my mother's scream in the morning seemed
equal
to the structure of a threnody, beams visible in the burning roof.)
imaginary angels in the delirious yellow pollen.
behind the curtain of duration, past islands.

I was a watchman there at one time.
Locked in an office. I had a lot of papers. There were many windows
in
the building: to the north, to the south, the east and to the west. I
was a watchman of windows there, locked in the building with the
cast
iron gates, watching how forms of air alter, by the candlelight
dripping
at the trees—and the investigations were conducted with absolute
regularity.
I waited for water.
It surfaced, spilling breath.
An involuted cloud passed over the kitchen garden, above the
poppy's
arabic face, in the open fabric of the leaves, in the tattered
thistledown.

Both sink into the tree, changing like air

space turning in on itself, just as the continuous body is
self-absorbed,
the letter
drawn into the funnel of the word
Remember foxes and cold fragile nests
berry stains I don't remember the wrist a hollow
decaying vein

It's a forest

Or a field in autumn. The rustle of smoke in the mouth, a hare's
scream
slipping off to the edge. The field. A rustling. First snow. Nothing adds definition to their goal, as they sweep each other away. Sounds quietly drift, swing up, and melt away behind the unstable wall of drifted snow. They exhaust the raven. It strikes against the wall of an immobile night. A hunt. Sharp vacant days.

Broken fire
scholarship of smoke late in the day.
The clay is porous.
Rows of high rains.

The heavy stars collapse in Scardanelli's eyes.
Sometime.
Birds fall into wide gorges at the poles. Feathers of imaginary birds
above.
the light in clots contracts like beads within a mercury skin. The
empress
returns in the first form of a sister, and the page is
ending Mercury
and foam wheat poppy and verbena lilac in the gloomy
north
aurum of decay.

She, he, it without moving. But here we're not comparing numbers to
the
ciphers of first errors. A thousand lines together, ten
thousand
worlds swim onto the surface of the rapids.
Deaf and mute, a snowy gesture.
Is that how it was?
A bridge bending over the black vineyard sea.
Who then walking down the street?

Evening on the delta. A gust in the evening. The pine needles of the
bay are black.

3. pride a description disintegrates, absorbed into another

irritation at the breaking up of white

"nobody can accuse me of false faith."

"and there, my soul—a permit—you arrive."

one thinks perhaps of grass
defying the meaning of distinctions until they are negated:
gender, number, case

A butterfly with a bloody mouth gradually disappears in the
doorways of a scream

(Note to Accidia):— "Everything begins as an error of vision . . ." just imagine I came to read this in I don't remember which of your letters, transmuting a simple phrase into a ridiculous one.

And regardless of the obvious unfoundedness of such an "interpretation" without long consideration I included this line in the text of the poem now known to you as "Accidia". (. . . .)

Does Accidia signify in my case, you may ask, stillness, silence, a dying down? Agreed. Partly because I always agree with everything. And nevertheless, a long time before the need arose to specify the word's significance, before I had to even approximately select a "leading" sense, this word for a considerable time, disappearing and reappearing, lived as sound, at times rolling away somewhere entirely on the periphery of vision, remaining there for a short time as a dumb grapheme.

I didn't question it about anything for I felt no necessity. It was almost fleshless, light, like winged seeds in autumn floating, perpetually revolving above the earth . . . But together with this there was a viscid, as if Cambrian, blue clay melting in dried out depths of heat. It abided, not converting into an odious veil of associations, as it was, seeking no continuation either in acoustic or in colour conjunctions, although it possessed excellent vowel inflections like dampness or memory of love promising (in the no less unstable future) the well-known flexibility of misleading harmony. In Persian miniatures lovers were depicted with identical faces.

It was ready to annihilate other senses without having acquired its own, I suspected. However leaving aside what was still for me a meaningless cocoon – such was the circle – as the figure of a virtual metaphor, of an unsubstitutable incarnation, it began to become transparent, to grow tense, to tighten into definition as something distantly reminiscent either of sandstone burnt into faded azure-purple, or as stone honeycombs darkening before the eyes as a delicate fretwork.

I again took to thinking of axes revolving on the metal strings of death, of a milky yellowness without any foundation, and then there appeared a dried soft crunching, a riverbed – mountain range – river-floor. And not even the floor but a mirage pouring out as hot steam over the burning clays, granite and earth.

However the word was completely innocuous, it tore away shadow and reflections not multiplying echoes, emerging and returning unchanged. Only in the passing of time within it, behind it began to appear, without any reason, something else – the old Russian word "speak" (rtsi). Speech and stream. Such was the first change. The stream was empty. The stream turned out to be the river bed of a sandy stream or the sand itself in another form: a concept immediately became very important – the blend of a definite and indefinite quantity in one word. Crafty, habitually-comfortable relations began to grow in the mastered grammatical attractions, to take on cunning and scatter at some instant or other, unexpectedly revealing mercury (rtut'), a lake of mercury, an amalgam and the sad mirror of language, its inside. "Everything begins with an error of vision . . ." – the line beginning the poem has itself slipped to the side, giving way to the one with which it now begins . . .

(from a letter to L. Kh. 24th Feb. 1984)

OBSCURE BASES OF NARRATION

(example readings)

1

Simple evening rose through flowing branches.

A deluding fire out of time, the flawless snow-crust lies
deeper and prouder than pine-needles.
The crescent moon is hidden there, not as a measure but as flesh of
light in narrow ranks of grain.
Wild white imprint, double of the sun.
Overcoming bronze and days that lie beneath a layer of wax
while the engraver's burin hesitates,
Like wine dim pink infuses it as when
Spawn of damp turquoise spatters on the hand
And it dispassionately grants the instant devoided time
attenuating skin
Before once more arising, soaring up, twining between the tiled
muttering of birds
And rooftop emptiness
Throbbing in hollow names as weather's pollen, as the glitter of a
transient net.
But the air is gray and breathing granular—like beggarly Beelzebub
rook-herd at the furrow of night,
And the poplar-branch construction in a gabble of scrub
Recalls a shell, its hazy mother-of-pearl, its chalky creases
where unleavened noise is ground.
The thread is fresh that sewed unsightly crepitation
Woven to form the crescent moon: as pine-needles, as fire

Then it starts splashing in an innocent flask—
(when you tilt it on your elbow towards your mouth and a
brown-robed mirror
starts to cloud over with a swarming rust and bubbles of the earth
forsake
this earth)—
Collapsing in froth and vineyard laughter, transsubstantiation of the
juice into a russet heavenly wind
Screened by a blurry weave and withered to the vine's bone,
Brother of Hebron, son of the averted head, it blows from

hummocky provinces continuously towards the rocky turquoise
Where muted vowels bulge the air, sliding like resonant scales of ice
When sound extended to an echo is comparable to a landscape seen
through a tunnel:
Thus in terrestrial surfaces of a river
Entering heat's dark nature—but who could here distinguish heat
from frost?—
Confusion to the core, snow thaws, washing away reflections.
A night of cherries, you can't evade that phrase, in order not to utter
stupidly: the tree of discord.

2

Ineluctable the happy hills fragmenting drop by drop in the eye's
globe
Which scans the sickles of irregular birds and where, we are told,
chillness reigns:
I still can't understand the algebra of fruit,
The volume of the surfaces round a central stone,
The wrinkled meekness of shrouds and funeral linen with its dry fish.
The zenith's node is plain, connecting the temporal to a shadow
and fontanelle to fountain.
The vocal caprice of the gates of horn and the entrancing pallor of
an underwater porch bear no comparisons,
Categorically I'll state—again beloved features will be discerned
in the delusions of the weather
In the sleepless mulberry tree
(whose articulations slike like oil smoothing harsh gestures and
tentatively conjure up Cathay in the charcoal circle of the
moon),
In the herds of rumbling and in lowlands (over the winter apples are
stored in straw, life and a sense of sight ascribed to them in
ignorance, like barefoot thieves they trace their melting tracks,
paperface lantern figurines prostrate in their cartons),
In the lymphatic blood of lengthy evening like an enumeration of
signs
in depictions of various times of day and year,

When the dispersed word had not yet threatened flight
The cockerel struck its beak into the clay and as if somnolence were
split apart simultaneously two—or maybe more—existences
are scattered to the winds
trickling into hollows

at the nexus of interjections.
Two worlds of form, silence and dumbness, a hundred thousand
intercepted blades
Of grass. Slaked lime and pigeon-purple the Crimea will landslip like
a scree vanishing at the base among the roots of oceanic hills
Flattened on a photograph into gentle green strata of heights
And continually beginning to be: the roofs, bell-towers.
Swifts, after nine in the morning and the chimes. Always afterwards
and tomorrow in predatory reading.
A moment later by a hairline shadow, by a cobweb glint
A peak's perfection has been connected to the split lucidity of water
By elastic syntax—so you wrote—in which the noun is boundless
And names of birds lack power to serve as inklings, plummets of
augury.
A house behind and in front. The walls are brighter than the night.
So it was, will be, there is nothing better. Just consider, that's what
things have come to . . .
Spindle of strolls, yarn of strange vowels,
An hourglass freshly filled with sand.
Stammering, fumes of onomatapoeia, thread meshed with thread the
weave of radiant hearing,
The world starts chattering in dialects of roots, reeds, rind,
And like a strawberry
Pressed by the tongue against the palate as if between infected
hearing and a cloud
The mouthful of the meaningless basis must be allowed to freeze at
the verge of the throat
As at the verge of a meeting and sever breath.

Presence of a broken fence,
Linen flows in silvery scales,
A vagrant cat, sieved sunset,
And not a building site—a pilgrimage, the page
stretched beyond the ripples of the alphabet.

3

Not the wilderness overgrowing boats on limpid shoals
But the intolerable blandness of roast chestnuts.
A dusty flag twists round its pole and splashes,
Swarms of winged creatures gluttonously in gardens
gobble the orange lobes
from the passionate lips of crones. This is at play . . .

The warm piazza, jasmine and seeping patina
on roof-slates roasted white-hot
And a multitude of verbal endings,
But then as if by chance someone remarks – September.

A painted tram goes over to the Petrograd Side,
From the Harbour District a ship sails picturesquely
beyond the boundary line of good and visibility,
At the Canal Asylum the midday glare is flanneled off the walls
and sweat from faces,
And there it is, the organ-god is sobbing
like a slavonic blade of twisted crystal. The heat,
boundless distances, a cloud.
Creak of seagulls.
The swell.
The river. And you hung over it among the feathers of the breeze,
brown dragonflies and swamping images.
At seven planned rain already lashes the glass
Constricting the place of habitation and tea
And the tobacco warmth of woollen socks is bitter on feet
and hinders talk
of halfwits, brothers, razorblades and ships,
and of a language school which somewhere in San Francisco . . .
spin, melody, revolve and rattle slightly
inside a well of uvular moisture,

But halfway through the night a half-bird comes in dreams
And it is not itself but just a half-word – let it drink like amnesia's
double, like the fish-scales of a labyrinth
Like Ba escaping southwards away from islands and the sum of
incarnations
Weighed on the balance of hope and judgement on which account
truth is extensive or heavy or naive as eternity
And altogether an indestructible blueness –

In enormous quilted jackets under Hesperus guiding
the resinous procession of lamprey fishermen.

It's pouring on the floor in squares of lamplight
That crept up furtively towards the frames.

4

Murmur of the Baltic,
The darkness of snowy poplars
reverberates as simple parables
Whose medicinal feeble-mindedness is all-powerful . . .

October is forged from breathing's needles
And the fibrous wind penetrates
City slabs to the marrow of their bones
And a husk of clothes cannot keep in the warmth

When someone's shrunk inside them hunching shoulders
—whose I no longer know—
in mutely braided snows
Where a maltese murmur, ancient amber,
Coiling airily like fragile coal
Crumbles from the thread of jagged death.

Then it makes sense to keep count of the drops
As of the birds flaring over Erebus.
Snow doesn't last. It's peaceful and the poplars
slowly push aside the city roofs

And don't say: loss—there's nothing to be lost
Beyond memory squandered word for word.

A SENTIMENTAL ELEGY

(a gift for Anna)

Let the mouse run across the stone.
—Aleksandr Vvedenskii

"Tell me, what binds us to some meaning, what drives us
out of our mind?"
Darkness
of a racing cloud, trace of glass, whiteness.
Rim of a clock face.
The vastness of death and its insignificance. Debris
in flight in a scorched haze of dragonflies—
We aren't going anywhere.
Wells where even at noon the stars are sharp
But branching out like a book into strangeness—a possibility
always remains,
the sand
and to stand still.
Some word like the mould of a rule reveals the world reversed
mirrored down the axis of matter.
Thus
in the tireless trials of freedoms
this peeling apart.
Perhaps—"but it's meaningless"—in the twilight of prisms
where straight winters suddenly explode into ice,
and as indivisible fire
wind rocks it and scatters it in handfuls.
Thus
in the trials of flight between zenith, nadir, window
and unshaven cheek,
ochre and heather,
in the debris of streaming heights . . . The home of these things
in the visible image eludes us. What's behind them?
The same that's behind us, and before us.
The whim of a stroll, hair like laughter far off,
Not to remember—to weave a cobweb into the structure of hearing
Into the correspondences of minutest registers

Dark swarms of them flicker
Swarms
matching the spirals of the pulse braiding dry riverbeds of the wrist.

And the sequel is absurd.
The conquest of what?—like a photograph, its filigree
lost in a grid
For everything must be begun, however you look at the snow
and the fire
Like scraping your cheeks with a razor
reflected in the melting ice on the window
And again the nature of sunset is unknown
And of the spatial partitions that create it—time?
body?
memory? the line?—and of intervals glimpsed by chance
when branching out like a book into strangeness.

2.

The spoken fact is a lamp, but what affects us is "spring thunder."
Light speaks its name brokenly and immediately you can hear
how next to the unclear map the dry celery flickers,
glistening hoarsely like the river weeds of the wrist

The tap is running

But take some bitter coffee beans, let them be spun
into fragrant dust,
let them be simmered,
"odds and evens" ground down, stopping the run of whirled resins

And turn to the braided, invulnerable water
For there the fluid time of its fall is shattered
A splinter of light catches in memory thousands of selves

Stubbornly returns—the way against their will children
catch the claw of a bird in the creaking kitchen, perhaps . . .

I don't remember.
I was shifted a pace aside
From myself, from everyone, and that includes God
approaching the fatherland of clouds
and cutting off my gaze from flashes of sand and of trees

Summer passed
hiding nothing in the deep blue
a branch of elation sinking
into crystalline salts of reason

"What is it that melts in us or binds us together, tell me?
in the sequence of days
and of days now and then alternating with night . . ."

drawn out beyond limits of the mind to the stillness
in each chance sound
split by the desire for binding.

Note on epigraph of "Sentimental Elegy."

"In actual fact objects – are a faint mirror image of time. Objects don't exist. /. . ./ Let the mouse run across the stone. Now count every one of its footsteps. Now forget the word "every," forget the word "footstep." Then every footstep will seem a new movement. After that, since you have for good reason experienced the disappearance of your perception of a series of movements which you were erroneously calling footsteps (you were confusing movement with space), movement will begin to fragment, it will be reduced to nil. A flickering begins. The mouse starts to flicker. Look round: the world is flickering."

from "Chekhoslovenska rusistika XIII, 68 No.5
"Oberiuty" by Leonid Aleksandrov.

STUDY OF DIMENSION

Down beaches prismatic in the heat and mineral
Blessed indifference, spinning like refuse, empty,
Like a dream of eden, endlessly to drift, draining
into the photographic wall of matter.

Night's drawn-out, long harmonics are irreproachable,
Hearing weaves them and inaudible names break up
In stubborn utterances, in a handful of wet snow
And the unstable sense of omens fused in a patch of streetlight.

It was here. Well, so what? Shoes got soaked
And in the snare of fire rain throbbed like diamond.
Black silence of the dripping barges
like greasy fog cupped in the hand
And the instant is only—as light glints
Gray through the bared grin of the bridge.

* * *

"I dread my dreams . . ."

Shoulder turning carries away the fluent
weight of hair
By chance an interjection.
You heard?—It's April, spring
And a blue star is burning up the snows,
Its sister flies to meet it, gold
and weeping.
Then a lasting dawn.

No snow fell.
Stones roared. Stymphalian crones were sowing
morning, grains
Clinging to life in the poppy's throat.
And again as if breath melted out a mirror on the ice
Still the face lasted on the depths of daybreak—
Of coming into being.
Into the cobweb of awakening, it seemed,
her breathing is woven with vision.

ALTERNATE FEMINISMS

The Sun & Moon Press, now located in Los Angeles, has just published a gorgeously designed edition of Djuna Barnes' *Interviews*, edited by Alyce Barry, with a Foreword and Commentary by Douglas Messerli ($16.94; paperback $10.95). The period covered is 1914-31, when Barnes was earning her living as a journalist; the subjects range from performing artists (Gaby Deslys, Yvette Guilbert, Lillian Russell, Valentine de Saint-Point) to producers (Flo Ziegfeld, David Belasco), to radical agitators (Mary "Mother" Jones), preachers (Billy Sunday), writers (ranging from Donald Ogden Stewart and Rachel Crothers to James Joyce), con artists (Wilson Mizner), and fashion designers (Coco Chanel). The interviews are illustrated by Barnes herself, her witty caricatures – for example, a "cubified" Diamond Jim Brady with the caption "Though He Is a Diamond in the Rough You Can't Get Away from Him Without Taking a Memory You Are Not Likely to Forget" – constituting the perfect complement to her often devastating portraits. A German translation of the *Interviews* by Karin Kersten has already appeared under the title *Portraits* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1985): I mention this abridged edition because it includes marvelous photographs of Barnes' subjects: for example, Alla Nazimova playing *Salome* (1922), Yvette Guilbert in proper nineties regalia, and "Kiki" of Montparnasse in the raw.

In the new *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985), edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Djuna Barnes gets all of 8 pages ("Cassation," the Barnes story chosen for inclusion, is a relatively weak one), as compared to 9 for Amy Lowell, 16 for Edna St. Vincent Millay, 22 for Rebecca West, 32 for Tillie Olsen, and 33 for Adrienne Rich, who is the *doyenne* of the section on Contemporary Literature, the Introduction beginning with a quote from Rich's "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," and the headnotes alluding again and again to her writings and public statements. Indeed, Rich's view of woman's plight, as put forward in her personal essay *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision* (originally delivered as a lecture at the MLA convention of 1970) functions, according to Gilbert and Gubar, "as a kind of manifesto for both female writers and feminist critics in these [i.e. the post-war] years" (p. 1677).

Rich's manifesto is one of the few non-fiction works of the twentieth-century included in this 2500-page Norton anthology, an anthology that seems to be based on the conventional principle that literature, like Gaul, is divided into three parts, the three, in this case, being drama, poetry, and fiction – especially fiction. As such, it is interesting to compare *When*

We Dead Awaken to Barnes' texts called "Interviews" (in German, "Portraits"), texts that are, in their own covert way, also meditations on the role of the woman artist/writer in the modern world.

Rich's manifesto is a call for "Re-vision" of the literary canon and of the patriarchy that has controlled women's lives:

> Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves . . . how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative. . . . (p. 2046)

To illustrate these points, Rich provides us with the exemplary tale of her own evolution as a poet. Her early style, she observes, was modelled on that of "the men I was reading as an undergraduate [at Radcliffe, in the early fifties]—Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNeice, Stevens, Yeats." From these male poets, she learned that "conscious craft" and "formalism" were central, and that the "I" in a poem should be a "persona," not the poet herself.

The next phase of her career is described as follows:

> I finished college, published my first book by a fluke, as it seemed to me, and broke off a love affair. I took a job, lived alone, went on writing, fell in love. I was young, full of energy, and the book seemed to mean that others agreed I was a poet. Because I was also determined to prove that as a woman poet I could also have what was then defined as a "full" woman's life, I plunged in my early twenties into marriage and had three children before I was thirty. There was nothing overt in the environment to warn me: these were the fifties. . . .
>
> About the time my third child was born, I felt that I had either to consider myself a failed woman and a failed poet, or to try to find some synthesis by which to understand what was happening to me. (p. 2051)

And Rich then goes on to explain that conventional marriage, as practiced in the fifties, made it impossible for her to be a serious poet, that the anti-War movement of the sixties began to raise her consciousness, and that she had to free herself from her stifling marriage, and beyond marriage, from the authority of the patriarchy in order to become her true self—a passionate feminist and lesbian poet. Indeed, "To the eye of a feminist, the work of Western male poets now writing reveals a deep, fatalistic pessimism as to the possibilities of change. . . . The creative energy of patriarchy is fast running out." "As women," Rich concludes, "we have our work cut out for us" (p. 2056)

Rich's painstaking honesty, her willingness to put herself on the line, makes *When We Dead Awaken* a moving document, especially for feminist

scholars whose own careers have often taken second place to their role as faculty wives. Nevertheless, the essay is based on a series of questionable assumptions. First, the assumption that the place where poetry is naturally born is the classroom, specifically the Ivy League classroom where students are "exposed" to the "great poets" that Rich lists – a canon that in today's classroom includes, thanks to texts like *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, Adrienne Rich herself. Her first book, she suggests, was published "by fluke," but the fact is that it was selected, not at all by fluke, given its carefully constructed replication of accepted models, as the winner of the Yale Younger Poets prize for 1951. The judge was W.H. Auden, whose style Rich had consciously, indeed studiously imitated.

A second and related assumption is that the bourgeois life of the fifties (or, for that matter, of any other time), with its daily routine of suburban living, car pools, scout troops, and so on, stifles the woman poet's Muse but not the man's. "To be with a man in the old way of marriage," writes Rich, "requires a holding-back, a putting-aside of that imaginative activity, and demands instead a kind of conservatism" (p. 2052). Precisely, and to be a man in the same setting, to work 9 to 5 or rather 8 to 8 in, say, a Wall Street law firm, surely creates the same anxiety, as we know from the letters of Stevens or the outbursts against propriety found in Williams' scatalogical prose poem, *Rome*.

But then there are, and always have been, as Djuna Barnes' "interviews" so forcefully remind us, other modes of being – for both men and women. Even in the "tranquillised fifties," incidentally, when Rich was reading Yeats, Frost, and Auden, and when, so she complains, "the woman poet most admired at the time (by men) was Marianne Moore, who was maidenly, elegant, intellectual, discreet" (p. 2049), there *were*, after all, *other* available models. Many younger poets coming of age after the Second World War were drawing upon Apollinaire as well as Auden, Rexroth and Reverdy as well as Roethke, Olson as well as the *Kenyon Review* poets. Indeed, while Rich was, by her own account, reading Thomas and MacNeice, avant-garde male poets like John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara were rediscovering one of the great writers of the century – Gertrude Stein. Like Rich, Stein was a Radcliffe girl, the interesting difference being that Stein did *not* marry and have three children or do whatever it was "proper" to do in her day. But Rich, whose own poetry shows no sign of questioning conventional norms of what a "poem" is, does not so much as mention Stein in *When We Dead Awaken*, an essay that, for all its overt radicalism, exhibits the residual conservatism that made its delivery quite appropriate for its setting – the MLA convention – as well as its re-setting in the Norton Anthology.

The image of the woman artist that emerges from Djuna Barnes' interviews is very different. Perhaps the first thing to notice about Barnes'

female subjects (and this is also true for many of her male ones) is that they are what we would now call marginalized figures—eccentrics or originals who excell in one of the "low" arts or in more than one art. Thus Valentine de Saint-Point was a poet, novelist, dramatist, and critic, as well as the author of two notorious Futurist manifestos, *The Manifesto of Lust* and *The Manifesto of Woman*, and the inventor of a new form of dance "synthesis" called *metachorie*. Or again, Gaby Deslys began as a music-hall singer and then a jazz-dancer in Paris, became an extravagantly dressed star, celebrated by poets like Cocteau and dramatists like James Barrie, and then, during World War I, worked as a spy, using her dark coloring to pose as an Hungarian woman and uncovering numerous German secrets. And Yvette Guilbert, the great comic singer of the fin de siecle Latin Quarter, immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec in her yellow dress and long black gloves, became, in the mid 1920s, a film actress, starring in *Faust* (1926) and *L'Argent* (1929).

In all these cases, Barnes sets up her "interview" as a kind of playlet and treats her subject as an extension of herself. She provides precious little "background information," preferring to let her subject do the talking, often imitating a particular speech mannerism or foreign inflection (e.g., Saint-Point: "It is not that I mind the funny little fox-trotting, you call him?"), and letting the subject reveal the edge, so to speak, of her or his character—the genius or eccentricity that sets that character apart.

It is surely no coincidence that the artists and celebrities Barnes most admires all seem to share certain qualities—independence, a strong will, a sense of humor, grace, and especially courage. Thus, when the actress Lillian Russell is asked whether she thinks anything in the country is "going to the dogs," she responds: "I can't think of a single thing. Let me see—with women in the world how can things go to the dogs." And again, "When a woman is busy she hasn't time to fasten the straps about the wrists of the infamous. When one is busy cultivating roses she cannot speculate on cactus" (p. 55). Or again, when Mary ("Mother") Jones, the great union agitator and strike organizer of the teens and twenties, who had survived the death of her husband and four sons in the yellow fever epidemic of Memphis in the 1860s only to lose her home and all her possessions in the Great Chicago Fire four years later, is asked in an interview of 1915 what she thinks of the suffrage question, "She snapped instantly: 'I haven't enough brains to be a suffragette—I'm too busy trying to locate the left side of the world where the heart is supposed to be' " (p. 99).

The phrasing of this sentence sounds excessively sophisticated for a "simple" woman like Mother Jones, as does the following speech recorded in the interview:

> "Our women are going blank behind their paint. One hour out of the twenty-four should be used in comprehending the other twenty-three, yet

it's not done. There's a trouble in every century and there's a solution. We always acknowledge the trouble; we always fight the solution." (p. 99)

What Barnes does, I think, is to merge her subject's speech with her own so as to stress Mary Jones' paradoxical combination of strength and eccentricity. When a telephone call interrupts the interview, Barnes uses the moment to observe Mother's back, a "back [that] tells more than a gossip. . . . It is a flat, straight back, and broad. It has never had time to become individual. It is not a personal vertebra. Upon it has lain for many years the burden of burdens. It is not a back; it is a pillar" (p. 103).

If the Barnes interview makes much of the virtues of honesty and courage, the converse is also true. The one really cruel portrait in this collection is that of the great evangelist Billy Sunday, the one-time professional baseball player turned preacher, who railed, in Douglas Messerli's words, "against the evils of liquor, sexual promiscuity, foreigners, tobacco, motion pictures, and modernism in general" (p. 106). Barnes' interview, conducted in 1915, begins:

> One is instantly disappointed. How does one say such things; how, indeed, does one explain?
>
> Not because he is a little older than you had been led to expect, not because he is a little shorter, not because he is getting slightly bald—none of these things, for they would but tend to make him more human and by that more lovable—but because upon entering, upon saying, "Good morning," upon extending your hand, he is silent. Silent throughout your entrance, throughout your maneuvers to be seated without spoiling either his coat, hat, gloves, book or pictures; silent after a question.
>
> You had expected the eagle, you find the owl.
>
> In your mind "Billy" was a beautiful ballad. In reality he is not even a tune; he is a rest between bars. (p. 107).

The metaphors are wonderfully deflationary, warning us that here is a person who is not what he seems, "not even a tune." We are now ready for the great preacher's "opinions." After a few hostile little exchanges with Mr. and Mrs. Sunday, the interviewer, who has walked for an hour-and-a-half through the Philadelphia streets to reach the Sunday house, fires her first shot:

> Said I, "What has the war done to religion?"
>
> "What do you mean?"
>
> "Hasn't it affected the world's faith; there's more than one fist, they say, that has been knuckles since the war started."
>
> "War has been the best thing for religion in the last century; it has filled the churches, it has brought men to their knees in the trenches. What are they doing in Europe? Filling their guns, yes, and emptying their hearts. There has always been war; there always should be war." (p. 108)

After a series of such heart-warming observations, Sunday urges Barnes

to come hear him preach:

> "You will have a different viewpoint after you have stood it an hour or so; you will see why bicycles were done away with when automobiles came onto the scene. I've got the argument; I've got the speed and I've got the light." (p. 113)

And when Barnes follows Sunday into the church, she witnesses a total change: "Upon seeing [the] multitude, Sunday's demeanor changed as suddenly and with as little subtlety as the face of a creditor changes into a debtor. It grew radiant, it shone with suburban beatitude. . . . He fairly phosphoresced."

The last verb says it all. A "morose, silent, sullen" man when alone, who responds to the "multiplied expectation" like a "skyrocket" "burst[ing] into light." But even in her contempt, Barnes admires Sunday as an astonishing performance artist: "how can one help it when from [his] lethargy he wakes suddenly into a man so entirely different, so absolutely genial, so enormously human, so fine a comedian, so willing to gyrate, so ambitious, so light and often so logical?" (p. 118) But, so as not to end on this note of generosity, Barnes concludes her sketch by reporting Ma Sunday's whining complaint, after the sermon, that "You shouldn't make such dreadful pauses, Pa," and notes that "Outside they were selling for ten cents the story of his life."

In such portraits, the "interview" becomes, long before the heyday of *Paris Review* interviews, and, beyond these, the highly crafted "talks" of David Antin, the taped discussions of the Language poets, or the verbal exchanges Laurie Anderson sets up with various real and imaginary interlocutors, a serious literary genre. The word *interview*, let us not forget, meant, until a hundred years ago, "a meeting of persons face to face, especially one sought or arranged for the purpose of formal conference on some point." The OED, whose primary definition I have just cited, records 1869 as the first instance when the word "interview" was used in its current sense: "In recent use: A meeting between a representative of the press and some one from whom he seeks to obtain statements for publication." And of course in the historical examples now given, both interviewer and interviewee are designated as "he." What woman of 1869 could possibly supply the representative of the press with "statements for publication"?

According to Djuna Barnes, their number, by the beginning of the twentieth century, was sizable. Their "statements for publication" may take the form of *bons mots*, as when the actress and singer Lillian Russell is quoted as saying "I could never be lonely without a husband, but without my trinkets, my golden gods, I could find abysmal gloom" (p. 50). Or again, the brilliance of a given artist may become the subject for comedy, as in Barnes' 1917 interview with the actress turned producer-director Helen

Westley, which begins:

> "Hello, is this Miss Barnes?"
> "Yes."
> "This is Helen Westley."
> "Ah, how do you do?"
> "I want to be interviewed again."
> "Very well; I shall meet you at three-thirty at the Brevoort."
>
> I am there at three-thirty precisely. I order something "with a cherry in it" and await the appearance of the strange person of the Washington Square Players; and soon she appears, walking easily and wearing another of those adored, secondhand gowns; a secondhand book is under her arm, and she smiles, showing her thirty-two perfect teeth.
>
> "*Toute passe, mon ami,*" she murmurs as she takes the seat before me, shaking her earrings and thrusting the book upon the table. It is Murray's *History of Greek Literature,* and she knows it looks well. (p. 251)

That final substitution of "she knows it looks well" for the expected "she knows it well" is a characteristically Barnesian deflationary gesture. But it is not really malicious. For, as the conversation between the two women continues, Helen Westley shows herself to be a truly wise woman, a woman who has learned, the hard way, how to live and succeed in the theatre. Now, in middle age (Westley is 42 at the time of the interview), she has become something of a Wildean wit. "I took out a book on mental derangements from the library," she tells Barnes, "but everyone in it seemed so natural that I gave it up" (p. 258). Barnes laughs and responds by asking Helen if she considers herself a vampire, which she defines as "Anyone who can break a habit easier than acquire one." The jokes fly back and forth, Barnes calling Westley "A Mephistophelian lizard – very uncanny," and Westley responding, "Like a cloak model – very exclusive." The interview ends on a note of camaraderie – the natural rapport of two women who are witty, learned, clever – and who have worked together, Westley having directed Barnes' plays for the Provincetown Players.

"Both the victimization and the anger experienced by women are real, and have real sources, everywhere in the environment, built into society, language, the structures of thought." So argues Adrienne Rich in *When We Dead Awaken* of 1970. Half a century earlier, there seems, curiously, to have been less hatred of men on the part of literary women, and, surely a more genuine sense of accomplishment. Perhaps this is the case because the professions were not yet as compartmentalized as they are today, and the "popular" could merge with the "artistic" in ways unheard of for the Yale Younger Poets of the fifties and sixties. Or perhaps the cult of "personality" and eccentricity of the teens and twenties made it easier, for both men and women, to follow one's own bent.

One of Barnes' finest portraits of such a personality is called "Nothing Amuses Coco Chanel After Midnight." Douglas Messerli's headnote gives

us the astonishing biographical facts. Gabrielle Chanel was the illegitimate child of peasant parents in provincial Saumur. Evidently, her father regularly beat and sexually abused her mother. After his death in 1895, the eleven-year old Gabrielle was sent to an orphanage, where she spent six years, and then to a convent. At twenty, she came to Paris and became a shop assistant for a seller of "trousseaux and layettes," but she quickly grew impatient with the job and by 1903 she began to perform at local cafes. Her new name, Coco, came from the popular song of the day, "Ko Ko Ri Ko," which she sang nightly at La Rotonde.

Chanel's "break" came when, as the mistress of Etienne Balsan, she decided to become a horsewoman and, finding the women's fashions of the period too confining, had a tailor make her a pair of jodphurs, on the model of those worn by an English groom. Her genius was to perceive that women could wear "tailored" clothes and still look "feminine," and it was not long before she had a Paris apartment where she began to design clothes and later perfumes. A free spirit, Coco Chanel had affairs and/or friendships with numerous poets (Cocteau, Reverdy), painters (Dali), and aristocratic gentlemen, but her main love was her now illustrious House of Chanel. Closed briefly by her command when the Germans occupied Paris in 1940, the House of Chanel reopened after the War and has flourished ever since. Chanel herself died in 1971 at the age of 87.

When Barnes interviewed her in 1931, Chanel was approaching fifty, but evidently age posed no problems for her. Barnes' strategy is to let her subject do most of the talking, and Chanel's talk is, as Barnes says, "reasonable with that degree of reasonableness that we of the Western world look upon as a sort of unholy ease in the face of the miracles of nature. Of course! Chanel is one of the miracles just because she is natural. We are seldom natural because we are incredulous" (p. 379).

What is remarkable about the Chanel presented in Barnes' brief interview is that the "*plus grand couturière* of Paris, with an income of several millions, employing 2400 persons in her *atéliers*," a woman "who refused the hand of the immensely wealthy Duke of Westminster," likes best of all "loneliness, fresh air, country life, sport clothes, dogs, fishing, early rising, early retiring, lolling, and hard work, especially hard work" (pp. 378-79). Here is Chanel in conversation with Barnes:

> "If a woman wants to keep her figure, let her be employed, let her work. She will be happier, less self-conscious, and this state will be reflected in the figure. Men like capable women. There is no fear in her as there used to be when she was economically dependent, therefore there is more real beauty in her." (p. 380)

Whether Chanel actually said this or whether Barnes invented it makes no real difference. For Barnes uses the character of Chanel to present us with a portrait of a polite but confirmed feminist, one who believes that

a woman must be economically independent, that "a bad figure" is "in all its joints a timid figure," that the brave woman is she who refuses to destroy herself by bad habits, for "A candle burnt at both ends may shed a brighter light, but the darkness that follows is for a longer time" (p. 381).

How do we relate this Barnes-Chanel brand of "feminism" to the contemporary American feminism of an Adrienne Rich and, by extension, the feminism of her publishers, editors, and critics? My own sense is that Rich's wholesale rejection of what she calls the "phallocentric" vision of contemporary men, her insistence that "The creative energy of patriarchy is fast running out," may well reflect a powerful current in the contemporary university, but I am not sure it tells us much about the literary and artistic life outside the ivy-covered gates. Yvette Guilbert, Valentine de Saint-Point, Alla Nazimova, Gaby Deslys, Ruth Roye – these were the precursors of contemporary performance artists like Laurie Anderson, even as Djuna Barnes, like Gertrude Stein or Mina Loy, is viewed as a precursor by the brilliant women writers associated with the Language movement and with Kathleen Fraser's new women's journal *HOW(ever)*.

Barnes, herself a lesbian, and certainly a feminist *avant la lettre*, would have found the hatred of men, voiced by Adrienne Rich and her circle, a source of puzzlement, if not dismay. For why, after all, should one hate half the human race, and such an attractive half at that? To read Barnes' interviews with Lillian Russell and Helen Westley, with Mary Garden and Coco Chanel, is to be reminded that, in the words of Mother Jones: "When a backbone comes in contact with a Winchester, revolution is born." Especially when the backbone is draped in black velvet.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

Wednesday March 29 1985

Dear Clayton,

. . . . What I actually had in mind in December, besides the environment (Walden Pond, traveling light on earth for instance), as many times before, came out briefly where I said maybe Charles Norman in his 1960 biogrpahy dealt with EP's anti-semitism enough (and TSE's . . .). Well, Walden's all along been on my brain too, while more and more it's been shoved to the back of it. How much isn't too much is a question I've harped

on (I am indeed a cautious character, Apollonian – relaxation my ultimate if not hourly goal). I was forgetting the question what to do if I found myself opposite at the kitchen table wth a Capone say or Hitler, now powerless and older, at one time murderous and/or mad, in all probability as good as dead or still cold-blooded . . . If in mind I could and did absent myself, I might be moribund too. If things get tough enough, on a battleground, say, you don't think, anyway don't feel, worry, or you'd better not? (Hitler painted roses, so they say).

Three or four weeks back on "European Journal" (a weekly radio program emanating from Cologne), it was reported that some number of people were protesting an upcoming visit to W. Germany by the president of Paraguay. But Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal in Vienna welcomed it, as it would give the W. German chancellor a chance to ask the whereabouts of Dr. Joseph Mengele.

"American Caesar," the 5 hour documentary about the life of Douglas MacArthur, based on William Manchester's biography, John Huston narrating (and Manchester among the interviewees), was televised twice the week before last over an independent commercial station here. Towards the end of the repeat, I thought: MacArthur like Pound, Eisenhower like Williams. Though I don't know if Ike changed his mind really as much as WCW, MacArthur appears to have been half or 3/4 or 4/5 or xyz% full of contradictions. He also brought Shakespeare's Coriolanus to mind. Patrician/democratic not too much of a paradox. Or resolvable anyway, explicable – privately owned land coming in when a tribe settles down to agriculture and specializes, diversifies enough for sharing food et al to become difficult or pretty impractical. I guess. Anyway, you always have democracy and equity among peers, people seen as equals, or they're visibly tried for to a considerable extent, if none to often realized (and it seems to figure that any military officer is pretty authoritarian, yet it appears that Eisenhower was a good deal less so than MacArthur).

All kinds of, any number of, situations. Of course MacArthur had a lot more influence on Japan than Pound had on Italy, an obvious example that's cropped up illustrating an observation of Weinberger's. (No mention of Commodore Perry in "American Caesar" nor any of the Japanese who changed things after his menacing visit!) Subtle, indirect, delayed or long-lasting effects would seem to have been fairly real in times not so fast-paced as nowadays, when fewer people were writing and talking (and painting and driving cars and trucks etc). Not so classless times, you might think, but there's just the size of a perceived community, which if big enough gets more and more activity going (various degrees of perception?). It seems I can imagine what things would be like if I hadn't been born more than if the Bible or Shakespeare or Dickens' pieces or Newton's or Einstein's hadn't been produced and reproduced. Writing's been a force making for social coherence for one thing, community, as well as (or via)

entertainment. But now, reading *Paideuma*, say, may not be too much unlike watching a ballgame or looking into the newspaper (not so much *People* magazine? I haven't come across that yet – but *The Times*). Maybe I for one go for bad gloomy as well as pleasant news, though never thoroughly enjoying it; but history isn't current events, it's more like fiction, offers more of a pasttime. Ah well, some pieces sure are less like horse-racing or handball than others. But anyway, the bottom of Pound's laundry basket has, conceivably, been scraped. If not, it should be, lest anyone get his head buried in it too far.

. . . . Since an accident January 9th (I flew headlong out of this wheelchair in back of a van taking me and another home from exercise at UC Gym, when the driver had to stop suddenly and broke 5 ribs, both our chairs tied down to the floor, but, my own fault, I've never been strapped in the chair), I've been spending more time in bed – though I'm again getting up and lying down on my own, not a bad idea to, as I've a small circulation problem and was advised 10 or 11 months ago to keep my leg up, and to sit up straight lest I squash my liver a few years farther down the road – and reading more, it seems, than I have in these past 5-1/2 years in Berkeley. So I've read, 5 years after getting it and "A 1-24" in a swap at Sand Dollar Books, the Zukofsky memorial issue of *Paideuma*, this Winter 78 number the only one I've ever seen. From there, you'd scarcely make out that LZ ever "toadied" (strong word!) to EP as Weinberger has it, but was "saddened" (by the report of David Ignatow) by his "mental condition" on his return from the visit of the Zukofskys to St. Elizabeth's, and according to Celia, in an interview with Carroll Terrell, they had their disagreements, while she also says her husband never considered Pound was anti-semitic (!) but rather thought "if only" he'd "calm down" and collect himself, his thoughts, he would, sincere man that he was, get over his mental aberration, concerning fascism (maybe). Terrell, pressing Celia as to anti-semitism, Pound's, expresses his bafflement at such a "stupid" thing in him, and does note that one time in a conference Zukofsky, defending Pound, denied it was in him.

Back in Boston a number of times on the radio there was a tape of Robert Lowell, in preface to a rendition of Elizabeth Bishop's poem about EP in DC ("This is the House of Bedlam . . ."), remarking how Pound one day suddenly, when he was there, said (as if waking up?), "Did I say all that about the Jews?" A brief awakening that may well have been. When I read Ignatow's memoir I thought, oh yes, come to think of it (again?), people usually change, either along the same lines as before, or different ones.

(Evidently Zukofsky was more familiar with 19th and 20th century physics etc. than Pound. More than Williams too? Although ((or so Guy Davenport says in *Paideuma*)) when he was a child, Zukofsky thought the uncircumcised were unable to urinate "and was troubled to understand

the radically different physiology of *the goyim.*" Elsewhere in the same magazine, I read he identified himself, as a Russian, or through his Russian parentage, with the Bolshevik revolutionists, picking up where the Adams family and the U.S. left off, declined, a deline bemoaned by Henry and Brooks Adams, and/or Ch. Fr. Adams, who wrote sadly about, for one thing anyway, the shennanigans of big businessmen during the Gilded Age. Perspective of the family which is supportive and all still in the U.S. to a considerable degree and a lot elsewhere. These Zukofskys in Brooklyn were quite a family anyway . . .). . . . .

LARRY EIGNER

NEW CHRONOTOPES FOR OLD: SOME NOTES FOR JAMES CLIFFORD

Jim Clifford is a particular favorite of mine, the best commentator we have on the anthropology of an actual avant-garde—& maybe uniquely its historian. So I found myself immediately attracted (how could I not be?) to his conjuration of images of "the tribal and the postmodern" as it appeared in *Sulfur* 13. Here at last, in an area near & dear to me, was the promise that someone was about to free us from the assumptions of our modernist predecesors & to place us squarely in the present as postmodern time. I don't believe that Clifford succeeded or even intended to succeed with this, but certain implications of what I take to be his failures—or his misperceptions—make me want to follow up on them.

I find it curious to start with that Clifford presents the cultural performances in question as instances of a kind of composition by collage. For collage is the great structuring device (& more) of early twentieth-century (= *modernist*) art, appearing there under a multiplicity of names: simultanism, vortex, montage, surreal or double or deep image, assemblage, perspective by incongruity, or plain "collage." While I've given myself to work of that kind too, I've sometimes wondered if it didn't leave me vulnerable to an oldfashioned modernism rather than liberated into the postmodernist future.

"Chronotope" is Clifford's word for it this time around: a time-space configuration—in "life" as well as in "art"—whose outreach to history a little resembles Pound's vortex or (anthropologically speaking, after Frobenius) his paideuma. A chronotope exemplifying the primitive/modernist connection would be "the surrealist studio of the 20s, filled with

African and Oceanian art" (or the Trocadero Museum in Paris that preceded it), while that proposed for postmodernism might be the Zuni shalako house described by Barbara Tedlock (or its replication – should that ever happen – in a specifically artworld setting). The contrastive, though tentative, chronotopes would then seem to be: a museum or an artspace on the one hand; a dwelling, both religious & domestic, on the other. A distinction, in short, between art & life, the reversal of whose tyrannies over one another had been proposed by John Cage & others back in the 1950s.

Clifford's "(temporary) exhibition" (a postmodernist answer to last year's primitive/modern show at the Museum of Modern Art) begins with the Zuni ritual from Tedlock &, in particular, with certain of its props & decor. What emerges from this is a baroque image of multicultural textures – largely or most memorably those we would think of as *non*-Indian (streets lined with white Mercedes; men in Tony Lama boots; strangers dressed in dayglo orange, pink & green ski jackets; Arabian tapestries of Martin Luther King & the Kennedy brothers; & so on). This is a major point of Clifford's presentation: that we have unjustly overdone the demand for a kind of cultural purity as authenticity – a DEMAND which we have no right to be making in the first place. The hybrid quality of culture – a condition that I think is undeniable – means, if taken to one possible logical conclusion, that what you see is what you've got. If the modernists' tack was to drop out what they thought was non-essential or unlike their image of the art they wanted to observe, the postmodernist response would be to honor all that is there at any given moment. There is presumably no judgment as to what is *more* or *less* important.

I have no problem with that as a general proposition, but in the specific instance questions do arise. Mostly they concern the nature of the collage being presented, of its actual location in space & time. In the brief but jampacked section quoted from Tedlock, we move from car-lined & spectator-filled streets to a view through a door or window of the interior of a house (or of several houses) newly built for Shalako. The people described are Zunis, non-Zuni Indians, & whites (the strangers in dayglo who have come from distant places); & the interior view is of walls with bright & gaudy hangings. Such hangings in our own world would have a decidedly inferior status (an appraisal which "decorative artists" & some other postmodernists have in fact resisted); but here they seem "almost hallucinatory" (Clifford), even exotic in their conglomerate effect. There is no doubt, however, that they are all descriptively a part of Shalako, although some ambiguity exists as to whether Tedlock is describing one single occasion & place or creating a composite picture of several. There is also a question of how much of what's described is central to Shalako & how much is peripheral. The (plural) white Mercedes, for example? Tedlock selects them, along with "quarter-ton pickups and Dodge vans,"

to make a certain kind of (social) point, but it is clearly a selection & not a mere description. No Fords, no Chevies, no Toyotas, though those must also have been present at Zuni. Or the tapestries of King & the Kennedys, tacked up on the wall beneath "mule and white-tailed deer trophy-heads"? Are they ceremonial in the same way as the altar objects & dance masks that turn up later in her piece? Other cultures incorporate such images centrally—make them into altar objects—but do the Zunis? And if they don't, what's the point of making it seem to be that kind of fusion? Or making it seem that everything inside the room has equal weight?

Tedlock in fact goes on to give the larger picture: the altar at the far wall of the house, the trail of cornmeal leading out from it, the Shalakos & mudhead clowns who dance before it. The textures here are no less complex, but the exoticism of the foreign & strange (= European etc) is muted, largely absent. It is as if a more significant "other" were now present, in the form of divine or *raw* beings, & from the sacred places where they dance, the foreign visitors, both Indian & Anglo, are "kindly but firmly removed." Only in Tedlock's description of the adjoining dining room (again a peripheral place) do the exotic westernisms come up that strongly—there & in the streets & ordinary houses, where the non-Zunis function as "a great crowd representative of all cooked or daylight persons [= human beings] on earth."

What surprises me most is how completely Clifford—for all of his postmodern inclusiveness—drops out those Zuni images that cluster around the altar. It's as if a "postmodern" view (if that's what we've got here) must necessarily neglect whatever held the most attraction for the modernists—like David Antin saying, qua postmodernist: "I reject the idea of a sacred language." But Tedlock, who stops far short of any such postmodernism, is much more precise & much more geared toward Zuni. While describing a "multisensory aesthetic of the beautiful" (Zuni: *tso'ya*) that touches both on what I've been calling "central" & "peripheral," she doesn't lose the one in pointing to the other. Rather her description remains open to distinctions still honored at Zuni—both those between "daylight" & "raw," & those tied to what the Zunis call *attanni*, an aesthetic of the powerful & dangerous "somewhere near [the beautiful] or even bursting into the midst of it."

There are many postmodernisms (just as there were many modernisms), & I assume that the one invoked by Clifford comes from John Cage or thereabouts: the ideal of a happening in which everything is a part of the performance & on nearly equal terms. The boundaries between art & life are blurred, & life is clearly favored. It is an interesting refocusing of our attentions, & I can recall, as a simple example, sitting with Cage during a boring performance in Milwaukee, while he pointed out to me a pretty play-of-lights caused by the reflection through a partly open curtain of the chrome & windshields of autos passing in the street. I am used

to that perspective & have sometimes shared it, but I wonder too why it so often leads, as here, to an attrition of life rather than its enhancement. If Clifford meant only to show the Zunis as our contemporaries, I have no trouble at all accepting that. But their contemporaneity isn't merely a question of the cars they drive or the kitsch they redeem; it also includes "the powerful, dangerous, untouchable, dark, muffled, indistinct, shaggy, old, and plain" realm of the *attanni*: in other Zuni terms, the worlds of bear & raven. To omit these from a "(temporary) exhibition on 'affinities of the tribal and the postmodern' " is, I submit, to trivialize both the tribal & the postmodern & to make for an even greater (selective) exoticism than that from the old modernist/primitive perspective.

Yet the real sticking point for me is not so much Clifford's use of the Zuni materials as his account of Edmund Wilson's account of an actual performance of the Seneca Indian Dark Dance. Here my experience is not merely vicarious but personal. I first went to the Allegany Reservation in New York in 1966, spent the summer of '68 there, & lived for two years ('72-'74) in the leasehold town of Salamanca. Before that first trip I too read Wilson's *Apologies to the Iroquois*, & I too retained a memory of the Dark Dance along the lines of Clifford's description. I later saw one ritual performance of it, not in a private home but in the longhouse—a different situation from what Clifford describes & one that I contrasted to my memory of what Wilson said he saw (or what I thought & Clifford thought he saw from our shared postmodern perspective).

To refresh the reader's memory: Clifford recalls, in a further attempt to locate " 'tribal' creations in a complex, oppositional present," Wilson's visit to a " 'dark dance,' composed of traditional song sequences performed in an unlit kitchen. It is a strangely acoustic experience. And Wilson is surprised to find that while the ceremony is performed, in an adjoining room behind double doors, a group of old and young Seneca, including the 'master of ceremonies' and the old woman providing the feast, are watching TV. He is bothered by the distracting noise of a comedian's jokes. Wilson eventually succeeds in blocking out the scraps of light and sound coming from the next room. He is swept up in the dark 'oratorio.' " The question Clifford then asks is whether the actual circumstances of the performance aren't a part of it as well—noise & lights & all. "Concerning the tribal," he writes, "or any site of authentic cultural life, must we block out such 'noise?' "

It is a fair enough question, but going back to Wilson's account & to my own experience, I find myself disturbed on several points. To begin with, the Dark Dance is probably the worst example I know of a traditional performance in which the periphery is to be factored into the total work. It is rather a model of focus on a central event, a chronotope of absence for which the darkness is crucial & the presence of light & of extraneous voices intrusive from the Seneca point of view. In the longhouse

performance that I saw, every effort was made to eliminate even exterior lights; smoking (nearly always allowed in Seneca ceremonies) was forbidden; & the "oratorio" was so powerful & so loud that any sound of passing autos or other outside noise was completely blocked.

The truth of the matter is that Wilson, who saw the Dark Dance in a much less guarded space than I did, doesn't at all contradict this. The house is darkened when he arrives there late, & he & his party aren't allowed in until the first "intermission." Only then do the lights come on, & he becomes aware of the TV in an adjacent room. With the intermission over, the house lights are again turned off, & what light might be coming from beneath the double doors is blocked by the bodies of the women dancers, whose singing & feet-stamping are more than enough to drown the TV sound out—assuming that the sound is even on, for at the end of the performance Wilson mentions that the TV sound in fact is off. Nor does he ever indicate that he is "bothered" or that he has somehow to "block out" the lights or "the distracting sound of the comedian's jokes." (All quoted words are Clifford's.) Rather, he tells us, the performance is "extraordinary—exciting and at first even frightening. The singing fills up the room . . ." And he goes on to wonder "whether all oratorios ought not to be sung in the dark."

The answer to Clifford's question, then, is that *we* have no need to block out the TV noise, because the TV noise is not there to begin with. It has been blocked out by the dancers, who are engaged in a performance, a rite, in which such noise does not exist. Nor do the objects & doodads of the Seneca kitchen exist in that darkness—family photos & plaster-of-paris animals & dishes from Niagara Falls—for every effort has been made to leave a space, not only for an "authentic cultural life" but for the numinous presences that such a life implies. Wilson is being exact & thoughtful in his description, never cranky—& even if he were, he would be no more of an intruder with an outside aesthetic than Clifford or myself.

But there is a still more disturbing side to all of this—from an Iroquois & from a larger human view. If the Senecas were able to merge the TV image with that of the Dark Dance, that would be a potentially healthy hybridism. My own experience is that what's happening here is that one image—one *culture*—is unevenly overtaking the other, not toward a fusion but a virtual annihilation. In other words, the time is fast approaching when the TV & the Dark Dance will not share the same space, as Clifford imagines, but the TV will subsist by itself: "authentic cultural life," if you want, but no different in Salamanca than anywhere else in America. It is nearly thirty years since Wilson was there, & already singers of many of the ceremonies have fallen silent. Singers from other reservations, old men themselves, are being called in to perform the ceremonies—with no tolerance, let me add, for hybridizations, but antiquarians themselves, who are trying to preserve the "authentic" old ways. To say that the Chevies

or Datsuns in which they drive there have *meaningfully* become a part of those doings is to indulge in a cruel postmodern joke. Brass rings for the false faces' eyes, plastic tubing for the rattles, Goodwill clothes & mod dress for the beggar clowns are one thing, but the TV in the next room is truly something else. It is a killer in Salamanca, & it has already become the principal cultural vehicle for the young.

What flourished there once & survives marginally today is what Rasmussen (for the Copper Eskimos) called an *intellectual* culture. Intellectual cultures can change odd items at will & have always done so. But there is only so much loss of language & idea – of measures & values by which to know the world – that they can endure. It is not that we would want the Senecas to give up TV & to dress up as "primitives" or that we would deny their "identity" unless they do so. Nor would the Senecas have it that way. But that's a far cry from overlooking that cultures & languages can be destroyed & that this is also a part of a "complex oppositional present."

I don't know how much of this applies to the realities at Zuni or elsewhere, & I don't intend to speculate about that beyond what I've already quoted from Tedlock. I went to Salamanca to see something, & I don't know if I saw it. But I fear more & more that I have been a witness to a death – as prophesied by our dear friend Harry Watt, who can no longer speculate about it. Maybe it doesn't matter in the long run, but I can't say that either. I feel sure that a little light will always break in from behind a curtain or around the bodies of the dancers anywhere, & I'm sure that I'll remember to take pleasure in it, whether in Milwaukee or Salamanca or New York or Paris. But I don't think it will make up for the memory of what soon will only be a memory.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

Sir:

I have been studying and writing on the phenomenon of specialization in contemporary literary activity (and as a general 20th century intellectual development), writers specializing in themselves as a unique manifestation, called 'a Voice,' or as a bloc, with – for example – feminism as their identity-stage. Your correspondent Benjamin Friedlander (ne Friedlander), in Sulfur #13, exhibits the extent to which Jewishism has served (or, as Charles Bernstein would say, 'J-E-W-I-S-H-N-E-S-S') this

bloc-identity obsession as a mass-form of specialization in individuality. The specializers feed their special identity grounds with everything they can grab and import into it. It was over four decades ago when I first thought to enter my 'maiden' name in biographical notes (it had been replaced by a 'married' name in 1920); but not until fairly recent time did the fact become a scoop for Jewish Studies sleuths, Jewish-identity cultivators, connoisseurs, creators. The fictiveness of such identity-ideology releases its practitioners from all the discretions of scholarly and critical care in their seizing upon subjects for absorption into their proprietary systems. I did not supply record of the name to signal 'I am Jewish.' I am, in family-line make-up, three parts Jewish. But I was not brought up in accordance with Jewish customs, practices, religious beliefs, nor did I follow my father's course of making socialism a faith. Friedlander's use of Jewish-themes cookery gadgets to pick up my conception of the nature of poetry, and my dedication to truth as an end for a real kosher dish with which to flout the stylish repugnant concoctions of Pound, or Riefenstahl, is make-believe literary insight concerning myself and my motivations, doings, writings, of the extreme in nonsensicality – there is no lack of material with which to compare it.

There is a ghastly indifference to actuality in Mr. Friedlander's imagining me as provoked in 1939 by the war to turn away from poetry, and in his identifying several poems as profoundly steeped in backgrounds of Hebraic thought, and in his associating the emotional and intellectual constitution of my 'best' poems with the characteristic mood and mind of "the Jews of the Diaspora." I renounced poetry in the early forties, not because "war must have made art seem all the more corruptible to Riding" but because of a long-developing appreciation of the human need of more knowledge of the potentialities of language than of more poetry. I did not renounce poetry as 'art;' I renounced it as the Way language really opened. This Way I came to see to be an identity of life and word, self and language, mind and meaning, that made poetry a vision of the unities, not lived, spoken, unity of being. Jewish themes? Homelessness? Jews of the Diaspora . . . ? When I was an undergraduate at Cornell University, I had some friends among graduate students. Harry Kaplan, then an instructor, later a noted classical scholar, was one of these. He delighted in knowing who among the famed were Jewish, but boyishly. He also delighted in Jewish jokes, in very adult appreciation of their balancedness between fun and gloom. The most unforgettable has been about the man who urges his friend to marry. "You can't guess how wonderful it is," he said. "You come home from work, tired. Your wife greets you enthusiastically. There are the good odors from the ready meal. Your slippers await you. 'Make yourself comfortable," she urges. She talks. She loves to talk. Oh, how she loves to talk. Oh, oh – on and on it goes. Talking – oh, oh, cholera's horrors, the talking!" Here, the friend, who

began recommending marriage, clutches his head in crisis-emotion. The trouble with Mr. Friedlander is, he uses talk to fill a void, he makes a void with talk. And this holds for Mr. Charles Bernstein also. Pound, in the *Cantos*, was speeding along on the waters of Jewishness in his phallic neat little fascist motor-boat. As to Eliot, oh, dear, how you specialize the identity of one who over-generalizes! And isn't that the same as over-specializing? And, anyhow, how to fit Stein, and so on and on to Riding, into the neat generalization American modernist as against European modernist? Where are we? You are talking yourselves out of confusion into confusion.

LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON

PS to the Editor:

I did not feel moved to refer in particular depth to the case of Pound. What you call my 'quip' covers, for me, the "perceptive" force of the combined Bernstein-Friedlander characterization of the Pound phenomenon as humanly discreditable while literarily and culturally creditable, with the indeterminate qualification as to the credit side that the intellectual and cultural sources of the poetry were full of admixture of Jewish enlightenment. I consider the case of Pound the poet best handable in terms of the role he cast for himself as poetry-expert. He used the touch of a roughneck with the muscle behind it of scholarly authority. In every other field of activity in which he engaged, he assumed the role of expert, and used, alike, the roughneck touch, reinforced by much confident shoulder-play. But roughhouse is no excuse for roughhouse. And literary criticism directed from special bloc-identity ideological positions is roughhouse. My 'quip' describes the roughhouse of Jewishness-ideology wielded as critical treatment of Pound that has some bristling manifestation in certain areas of Sulfur #13. I have no tenderness in Pound's regard, in his poet-role. But I dislike the roughhouse of the lumped position acting the part of literary criticism – especially where it is visited upon work of mine as a form of love.

L (R) J.

INTERNAL RESISTANCES: THE POETRY OF EDWARD DORN
ed. Donald Wesling. (Berkeley: U. Cal Press, 1985), cloth.

Internal Resistances is a rescue operation of an elusive poet from unfortunate obscurity by six good, willing scholars, all of them carefully hand-

picked to represent in some way or another a West Coast allegiance. The intention of so doing is to try to bring off a critical deliverance of America's least known postmodern, Ed Dorn. Each essay is a conference with the critic, a look into his own mind and feelings as we all sway together over the night roads on the way to the jungle. An air of sincere concern pervades this little book; and no one wants to say he doesn't like Dorn, although an amount of squirming and disinclination can be felt under the text of some writers. Dorn is that ambiguous intelligence of many conflicting works; he says things that no reader can like altogether. He manages to offend *someone* in everything he says, even if the offense is exotic – like contradicting an obscure tenet of the "movement," or of raging against his colleagues, the public, the big "issues."

One Dorn doesn't turn into six in this book, but the facets drawn out by critical discussion do not link up to a *figure*, to a recognizable mentality or character, which is what these writers set out to get. Instead, Donald Wesling shows us the constituent, unassembled elements of a Dorn portrait, among which include song, wit, and pronunciamento – but these things never reach the public without being first filtered through a "comedic center," a sort of dressing room where everything gets into a guise of sarcasm and irony before going public. Wesling seems to suggest in this that the author of a mock-epic on Howard Hughes has some of the same elusive qualities. Robert von Hallberg approaches *Slinger* as a poem with "negative method," in which the referentiality of language is all turned inward, into its own closed system of puns and meaning-rimes, and ignores a collapsed reality outside. The late work (*Hello, La Jolla, Yellow Lola*) has turned "didactic," the opposite way, but these "poems are not particularly deep, nor wise, and few are moving (in a pathetic sense), however unsettling they are." Alan Golding has the regrettable task of defending these later poems in his own chapter, "Dorn's Pontificatory Use of the Art," but carries off the defense remarkably well. Especially well, when we learn that he was von Hallberg's student at the University of Chicago, where he wrote his dissertation on Olson.

Wesling makes a valid point in turning Dorn back to the 18th Century, his favorite period of English literature, where a rough and unsettling sarcasm ruled taste, which, Dorn himself has remarked, created the sensibility of the modern age. Wesling finds Dorn has the mettle to be "unliked," in an age when having the right ideals is a requisite of postmodern strategy. Of course, as many of these authors argue tacitly, under that blistering tongue and ambiguous nature are certainties that are values for life, for expanding consciousness and making things fit. However, the main thrust of the five essays is to find Dorn a prickly, indefinable cluster of attitudes and evasions lacking a demonstrable personality. It is therefore fascinating to find in Paul Dresman's essay, "Internal Resistance: Edward Dorn on the American Indian," a plausible argu-

ment that Dorn did in fact find a way of speaking of Indian culture in America without deluding himself or us. This essay is the one penetrating view of Dorn – that in remaining a white man outside the Indian paideuma, he could vent his feelings freely without slipping into the muck of white guilt or repentance. He could look at their culture with a certain admiration for its ways, and remain clear of its assumptions. In discussing *The Shoshoneans*, Dresman makes the interesting distinction that Dorn's prose carries more depth of analysis and observation than do the photographs of Leroy McLucas, simply because the role of photographer is so obviously the "other" to his subject. Dorn drops his sarcastic, ironic persona long enough to let Dresman portray him as a poet caught between two separate metaphysical systems, the white European tradition that he rejects, the indigenous Indian one he cannot enter. It is the only time Dorn emerges, just barely, out of the cryptic interiors of his own evasive work.

Three of the essays approach the thickets of Dorn's mock-epic, *Slinger*, and without delivering the poem whole and lucid to us, at least make sense of its terrains, its structural components, and a few of its motives, concluding that the detritus they cannot understand is the failed, unresolved portion of the poem. No one wants to claim that there is a consistent "sense" running through the five parts; things within the poem change identity too often to be tracked through it. Von Hallberg's approach to the language of *Slinger* is very good; he performs his specialty, the unraveling of gnarled poetry of the age, with cool assurance and a crisp, perhaps too neat result. One has the feeling at times that von Hallberg sees himself as an expert called in to perform a particular task for hire. He slips into a man's poetry, unties the knots in it – composed of a few data from life, a few preoccupations from past work, a little razzle-dazzle in the words – and poof! *it's gone*. What happened to the poem? Did it get "solved"? Was it a problem to begin with? Not entirely. Von Hallberg usually adds a little interpretative statement at the end of his exfoliations – the poem as a brief, fragmentary shard of the poet's thinking, or of his passing attitude. This is the way of the critical euphemerists, convinced that poetry only arises from the manifest material realms, and that its knots are all in the data one needs to know, not in the ether of spiritual issues or psychological daimons. The master of the mode is Hugh Kenner, but von Hallberg is fast becoming his rival in the brambled fields of verse.

Michael Davidson's "To Eliminate the Draw" is an attempt to show that *Slinger* "is as profound" as *The Maximus Poems* "in uncovering the cycles of greed and acquisition" in America. If *Slinger* is to be made the equal of Olson's poem, the comparison should be based on techniques – for that is the salient thing in both poems, not their subjects and themes. With this dubious goal put at the outset, one has little heart to follow Davidson on the trek. But he ignores his own goal and goes into the poem with care and insight, and turns up all sorts of things that are helpful in

appreciating *Slinger*. As von Hallberg remarked in his own essay "This Marvellous Accidentalism," *Slinger* is, ho hum, another quest poem in a crowded century, but Davidson throws together the ingredients of the poem and comes up with an identification that works—it is an ironic allegory, a near-epic, since it has all the picaresque furniture of one (journeys, heroes, villains, magical properties), but Davidson then shows that the set terms are new and different from the generic past—they are entirely plastic, altogether unfixed in time and space, unless one puts up the widest possible parameters of say the entire sense of the West and the entire time of its origins and history. Everything comes unglued in the poem, like a junk store whirling in space, and no one thing seems to remain itself for long. Davidson identifies the poem as the central testament of the drugged 60's and of the Viet-Nam war. Its books, he tells us, are written around different drugs: "the first to marijuana, the second to LSD, the third and fourth to cocaine." And because these substances alter perception, the poem breaks with Olson's principle of space as the primal influence on American life, and prefers time as "more fundamental." It's a little like asking which one is bigger, but the "states" of mind of the various books would justify this preference of bearing, I should think, since it is the more easily dissociated from sequence of the two. And Davidson has good philosophical credentials in this piece—for he next turns to a discussion of one of the oldest rhubarbs of the century: "is one's domain an empirical fact or a phenomenological projection?" Increasingly the answer comes back, both. And this poem testifies accordingly, showing that by the second half of the century the separate stances of American poetics have been bound together: empirical imagism, phenomenological symbolism. Dorn, however, dismisses the notion of phenomenology as a piece out of Cartesian dualism, and would prefer the generously holistic notion of a "cosmology" instead.

William Lockwood's "Art Arising to Clarity" leaves me a little puzzled on what he is insisting. He is disagreeing with Davidson and with Wesling, but that hardly matters in a book where consensus turns on a few details anyway. I have the feeling Lockwood doesn't want to be preempted on his own remarks, which actually corroborate some by his colleagues, in different tongues, but being in the middle of an essay book is a tough position for anyone, and Lockwood does what he can to distinguish himself. But reading him is like driving with the air bag inflated; one cannot get by a style of many circumspections, deviations, syntactical Christmas trees, to find Dorn. The prose is a thick lens of many dents and scratches indeed, and Dorn, though out there somewhere in the brush, is difficult to spot. "In general, I submit, wit increases the elasticity of *Slinger*," Lockwood says, but is this a secret to be whispered? Is it important? Should it launch a two-page paragraph to substantiate? And then Lockwood surfaces with another principle: "rigid stasis" versus "easy

dynamics." Is this anything like the fits and starts of most long poems? If so, was it worth the redundant categories here? Mercifully, the thought is not investigated for long and we can move on to other descriptive passages that ramble on about *Slinger's* terrain. Lockwood's is the longest essay in the book, and it goes by patches and locked sentences to its end, more or less rephrasing what has already been said: that Dorn is parodic, sarcastic, witty, evasive, difficult.

Alan Golding makes hay of the epigrammatic intensity of the late books of poetry, the ones nobody reads or reviews: *Hello, La Jolla, Yellow Lola.* He's puzzled why this poetry has attracted so few buyers, and even suggests as his opener that these are not "poems" but rather barbs for "bumper stickers." But Golding makes the case, a good one, that the "inside jokes" of these poems speak to an assumption few poets in America share: Dorn feels himself tuned in to mass culture, so much so that he can comment on things from a slant, and expect that in these things at least he can be understood. Here's a man willingly tuned in to his AM car radio, listening to mass America talk to itself, sing to itself, lull itself to sleep, and Dorn talks back to it in the same ways. So, "bumper stickers" may not be the put down it seems; Dorn is writing squibs for bubble-gum wrappers and TV commercials, Golding submits, and the fact that they wind up in pretty little paperback books, glossy covered, is the wrong medium for their nature. Golding also goes on to make light and truth of Dorn's connection to the 18th Century, as do the others; the epigram, he remarks, is the universal form of the poets then, and of Dorn as well. And in it one talks to society, one writes the caustic riposte to social life, joins in the fray, throws a verbal dart into the soft center of things. That's agreeably cogent when one struggles through the poems trying to make them into sonorous little lyrics. They're not, of course, they are aimed at a society that Dorn cannot make his peace with. He snickers, chortles, bristles at life on TV and radio, and in riding around the country jots down his little rebuttals, in the same sort of speech that brought him the news. Little or no artifice, Golding observes, although a scintillating sort of energy (everybody agrees on this) sparks the language into something better. In looking for sources to this mode, Golding makes a wide path around Creeley, who has accumulated a vast body of such miniature verse—not public, occasional things, which Golding says are necessary for epigram—but short, pithy quick-draw poems just as tangled and barbed. Creeley was Dorn's teacher and examiner at Black Mountain, and it seems arbitrary not to link these men up, even if Dorn voiced objections to Creeley's domestic subjects.

But a contentious Dorn still hides out and the critics, noble and patient men, have scared him out of hiding a few times and brought back evidence that he exists. Not one is willing to say that this mercurial intelligence has any comparable form in contemporary writing. Not once

is Thomas Pynchon given a nod, although *Slinger* is very much the poetic equivalent of Pynchon's *V* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. Both writers mock and deride the high-tech system of American culture, and both seem to prophesy doom to humanism and to escape from social illusion or government control. There is no prose tradition to be had in the book; not even Joyce is important as a "context" to Dorn. One or two sentences look askance to William Burroughs, otherwise Dorn belongs to a verse universe, with one root down to the pre-Socratic Parmenides, and another into the 18th Century to sarcasm and vilifications, and the rest all gnarled up under the campus of Black Mountain College. Dorn's a thorn, one critic concluded, having traced the putative etymology of the poet; he's a thorn in everyone's side, but a book like this speaks of a certain kindness and open-mindedness within the academy, to a sympathy that is more the testament to some durable values of the liberal tradition than it is to the powers of capturing certain intractable forces of culture.

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

SEVEN NIGHTS
Jorge Luis Borges, translated by Eliot Weinberger, New Directions, New York, 1984

Seven nights of course comprise a week, but the sense of completion is duplicitous. No lunar quarter exists in isolation from the doggedly uninterruptable movement of time. Literature pursues similar crescendos and decrescendos, and a useful question to ask is, how separate are its individual productions? are they abstractions like a phase of the moon? One man whose entire literary output nags at this question is Jorge Luis Borges.

The *Seven Nights* are seven lectures Borges delivered in Buenos Aires during the summer of 1977. His nearly total blindness required that he compose, retain, and recount each of them by memory. As he turns his mind's eye back to encounter the specific books that have nourished his craft, it is no surprise that an infinitely regressing universe unfolds. That the lecture which acts as a sort of pivot to the series should treat of the *Thousand & One Nights* gives an immediate clue to what Borges is up to.

> . . . for us the word *thousand* is almost synonymous with *infinite*. To say *a thousand nights* is to say infinite nights, countless nights, endless nights. To say *a thousand and one nights* is to add one to infinity. Let us recall a curious English expression: instead of *forever*, they sometimes say *forever and a day*. A day has been added to forever.

You may in the service of beauty, or truth, or anything else, add *one* to infinity. The addition of seven more is preposterous; it simply cannot, will not, increase the total. But can one be preposterous with impunity? Borges thinks one can. He is a man who courts the foolishness of storytelling with such resolution that it has invested him with grandeur. Blindness has added a peculiar sanctity. His stories and poems stand in a disbelieving world as talismans against the personal and cultural annihilation disbelief engenders. The *world of literature* is Borges' world, and in a strange inversion it seems to have modelled itself on one of its own instances – that collection also referred to as *The Arabian Nights*. Literature is nothing if not countless recirculating stories gathered into one boundless tale.

Recall that in the master story which frames the *Arabian Nights* the Sultan has been wretchedly deceived by his wife. In a blindness of fury and pain he vows to sleep each night with a new woman; and that he might never again be so deceived, to slay her in the morning. A slaughter of the land's marriageable girls ensues until Sheherazade demands to become the Sultan's bride for a night. She proceeds on light feet to the bedchamber and begins recounting an unfinished tangle of story. The Sultan stays his hand each morning, increasingly enchanted with what the following night might disclose. This most wrathful man cannot escape the allure of an unfinished fable. A thousand and one nights later Sheherazade bears him a son.

Two implications are here, both of which have consequence for Borges. First, literature is a talisman that guards not only the teller from annihilation, but its sorcery protects everyone in the kingdom, even the unborn. Second, though the book of *Nights* gives an appearance of having reached its conclusion, the nights have not yet passed; will not ever pass; *must* not ever pass. We quit making up stories at our peril.

If the tacit assumption driving the industry of literary criticism is nihilistic, is to pronounce some final adjudication and snap shut forever the covers of the book under consideration, then in these lectures Borges administers the antidote. He is trying to quietly insure that the Sheherazade in each writer will still be around come tomorrow night.

The topics he's chosen to explore are: The Divine Comedy; Nightmares; The Thousand and One Nights; Buddhism; Poetry; The Kabbalah; Blindness. His lectures curiously resemble stories; they are, in fact, stories – stories about literature itself, in which fact and fable intertwine. For Borges, books are not "texts" to be critically plundered by someone who can "finish" them with the diabolical finesse of interpretation; they are animated presences, like our dreams, waking by night to save us from oblivion. Children could listen to Borges' talks without restlessness I believe, because to Borges a talk follows only one impulsion, the bent of a story that needs telling. They presume nothing in the audience besides

an attentive ear and an ardor for anecdote. The man has no surfeit of knowledge he's trying to give away in some oppressive literary potlatch.

In these *Nights* the facts are at times oddly manhandled, I should perhaps say *disfigured*, like presences in a dream. Borges' interpretations are frequently cranky. Some of what he allocates to Buddhism is doctrinally suspect; I know less about Jewish mysticism but suspect certain beliefs he attributes to the Spanish Kabbalists are of his own hatching. However, in the sovereign domain, which belongs to Imagination, heresy lends greater vitality to a tradition than orthodoxy could hope to. Both Buddhism and Kabbalism have developed grandly under the impulsion of what they once condemned as heresy. Borges intuits that in the final analysis, doctrine, however eloquent, won't lend Buddhism, poetry, nightmares or blindness their irrevocable fascination. Anecdotes and apocrypha do.

With the gradual onset of blindness, which he claims began in 1899, the year of his birth, Borges has increasingly resorted to memory. The dramatic moment arrived, he says, in 1955 when he was named director of the National Library in Buenos Aires.

> I had always imagined Paradise as a kind of library. Others think of a garden or of a palace. There I was, the center, in a way, of nine hundred thousand books in various languages, but I found I could barely make out the title pages and the spines.

This is the difference between language and paradise.

Literature is a library comprised of, for all practical purposes, an infinite number of books. The contents of the 1001 volumes continuously contaminate one another. Borges' stories have over the decades persistently located books that no one ever wrote, and misplaced others that might have been written. The world of documented books is equally subject to disfigurement. What we call the *Arabian Nights* are no more Arabian than french kissing is French. An initial set of fables resorted to Persia from India, probably along with bushels of pepper in return—as Marco Polo observed—for fine Arabian horses. Raconteurs in Asia Minor combined some of them, twisted others, added a stock of their own. Several hundred years ago somebody compiled a set group of tales in Cairo, taking them perhaps verbatim from storytellers that dominated the streets after dark. One of the most widely disseminated stories, which surfaces in Alexander Korda's film "The Thief of Bagdad," was very probably forged by Antoine Galland. Galland was an orientalist who translated one of the Cairo renditions into French, introducing it to Paris in 1704 and infecting Europe with incense of the East. Borges evidently relishes such a confusion of tongues, and has now added his own Nights to the lot.

The lectures are done into English by Eliot Weinberger, who has served as Octavio Paz's translator for years. Though I have no access to the original for comparison, Weinberger has conserved the full oral elo-

quence reputation attributes to Borges. The result is an impressive directness of diction, and a disquieting ease with which complicated topics get negotiated. It is, as the Sanskrit poets used to observe, "simple, like the taste of a complex dish."

ANDREW SCHELLING

L.A. IN TIME

Gerry Mulligan the spikey guy who booted the baritone
in L.A. afternoons of ash on the venetians.
And his Chet of length, white drape phrases and early
bop lyric intentions, as if Bix had lived to curl Bird.
In this last-minute music there was more space between
the chairs, the ashtrays, the stripes of light, the tiny
bandbox low tile ceiling stage for looney interruptions,
quotes of your mother's favorite hum, and abracadabras
of All The Things a physics with no zones to plug.
High in a whiskey parturience they doodled on panes
of the early horse, grew thin but standable,
dwelt elaborations on all heights to tune.
Mulligan heard it Lester to Monk, the pretty snake of
laze to the clear box of casement, where pounds
at the tips won't interfere. He angled for the
clearest blend of caught line and held fold,
arrangement in a cut moment, no blurs as the
knee rises. And Chet, he was *so* bent, his
voice sheared higher, his locks curled Deaner,
even a dogface part in a picture, he lullabyed the
orphan boy in barracks khaki, and Time After Time
the teengirls watched his T-shirt shrink, tumbled
at his bell, and I Get Along Without You Very Well
(an ultimate gloss on crewcut Hoagy?). Where now
his smile when last facture dried from his picture?
He found and stood at point of breath all melody
could circle.

These guys drew in a Renaissance sky.
The Densities came later.

Unclutterable provenance. Where vacuum of
the notes not hit outline the ones that are.

A ThinMan's Music. Every time see
where all the four limbs go.

And even the chaos
utter.

23X84
CLARK COOLIDGE

ALLEN GINSBERG, COLLECTED POEMS 1947-1980
Harper & Row, 1984

This *Collected Poems* has apparently not been a success commercially. Its eight hundred pages, its copious notes (complete with extremely informal photographs of Ginsberg, his friends, his gurus) arrive too late to appeal to a cult, and too early to be necessary to a scholarly industry. Perhaps, also, people feel that the best of Ginsberg has long been available; that, like many poets his age, he did not altogether survive the encouragement the 1960's gave to his didacticism and his cult of spontaneity. But the existence of a *Collected Poems* at least provides an occasion to think about the most popular, and least seriously discussed, of important postwar poets.

For me, as for many writers and readers of my generation, *Howl* was the first poem that was News. Its catch-as-catch-can style dragged headlong into poetry that widest sense of "culture"—atomic bombs, "robot apartments," drugs, irregular sex, advertising, the suppression of the Left and its incipient reemergence in aesthetic, or "life-style," disguise—from which Robert Lowell said, in a famous interview, that the poetry of the 1950's was "divorced." The excitement *Howl* produced was altogether different from the excitement of confirmed interiority I got from the *Four Quartets*, or Dylan Thomas, or Rimbaud. It would take years, and a much more complex sense of the intersections of public and private in all poetry than I then had, to see these works from a common perspective.

But Ginsberg's style has at least this much in common with T.S. Eliot's: a new generation of readers understood it almost before they had read it; and yet, thirty years later, we have not finished puzzling out all that

it means or implies. As Karl Shapiro quickly perceived (though with a hostility born of political disagreements in the 1960's), Ginsberg's telegraphic manner is very much a part of the unsolid, fast-driving, media-ridden world it condemns. But the style makes that world, in turn, the mirror-image of what *it* would condemn and Ginsberg would flaunt, the "incarnate gaps in space and time" of drug experience. We fly through both worlds, in the poem, with an exhilaration new to literature:

> who chained themselves to subways for the endless
> ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine
> until the noise of wheels and children brought
> them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered
> bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the
> drear light of Zoo,
> who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's
> floated out and sat through the stale beer afternoon
> in desolate Fugazzi's, listening to the crack of doom
> on the hydrogen jukebox

But could anyone believe that this style – "sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind" – proposed a religious vision wholly separable from comedy and mania? Surely the naivete of words like "holy," "desolate," "kind king" is not altogether unintended? Surely the brilliant juxtaposition of "drear" – stolen less from the Anglo-Saxon, one feels, than from some 18th-Century forger like MacPherson or Chatterton – and "Zoo" is funny? It even makes one think of Norman Mailer's grim fancy – watching hippies in costumes of all epochs at the Pentagon March – that "the past (was) being consumed by the present . . . by nuclear blasts, and blasts into the collective living brain by way of all exploding acids, opiums, whiskies, speeds, and dopes. . . ." Ginsberg's poem is incredibly timely; and for that reason involved in the Gnostic dialectic of an Absolute that is not absent even in the lowest terms of earthly experience, but is subtly degraded even in the highest. This tragicomic dialectic sweeps through the poem, from the "ancient heavenly connection" in the third line to the "starry-spangled shock of mercy" in the next to last.

Marjorie Perloff recently had the courage to point out, in *The American Poetry Review*, that *Howl* is a comic poem in its substance as well – the adolescent posturings and inevitable, self-imposed defeats of its heroes, "who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully, gave up and were forced to open antique stores where they thought they were growing old and cried." Unfortunately, Perloff concludes that no serious political meaning can be attributed to these gestures. I don't think that necessarily follows; in fact, I think that most good political poems ("Easter 1916," for example) somewhere express a limit to the effectiveness of their

heroes and the moral authority of their speakers. Those that do not are not necessarily more serious, simply less realistic, more fanatical. The second and third parts of *Howl* present quite an elaborated politics, derived from William Blake's Prophetic Books. (Some years before, Ginsberg had had an auditory hallucination of Blake reciting "The Sunflower" to him: later, a "Brindaban lady saint" named Srimata Krishnaji would advise him, "take for your guru / William Blake the invisible father of English visions.") To a reader familiar with the Prophetic Books (one can imagine how many such readers existed, and would have taken *Howl* seriously, in the America of 1956), certain key terms—"specter," "the vast stone of war," "the Eternal War," "Moloch" itself—would immediately disclose a whole substructure of assumptions and symbols. Blake, before Ginsberg, had identified the Old Testament idol to whom children were sacrificed with everything in society that is unnecessarily repressive, that releases cruelty under the pretext of moral rigor:

> Molech rejoices thro the Land from Havilah to Shur:
> he rejoices
> In moral law & its severe penalties: loud Shaddai &
> Jehovah
> Thunder above: when they see the Twelve panting Victims
> On the Twelve Stones of Power. . . .

War, for Blake, is human sacrifice: the cruel Superego preying on the repressed portions of the self, projected onto "enemies" (hence Ginsberg: "the vast stone of war"). The "poverty" of this mental condition is indeed "the specter of genius," for "specters," in Blake, are the diminished capabilities of the conscious self when it loses contact with unconscious energies. The specter is particularly the "Reasoning Power" that despises the imagination—as Blake would argue, because of the imagination's hidden erotic component.

Moloch, then, stands for those aspects of the public mind that argue that it is sad but necessary to have hydrogen bombs, because the Russians are so evil, so unlike us; that it is necessary to have laws against homosexuality and marijuana; that political thinking should be "objective," not emotional; that art is at best irrelevant to the serious business of life, at worst corrupting. But more than that, Moloch is a metaphor for the idea that society has an existence as real as that of a living thing, larger than all of us and claiming our loyalty. Moloch is a kind of demonic version of the all-encompassing giant of Williams' *Paterson*:

> Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose
> blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are
> ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo!
> Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Because, of course, for Ginsberg and Blake and Williams, the reverse is

true: it is in our authentic, embodied, instinctual selves that we constitute a giant; all institutions are the creations or, more usually, the parodies of our collective imagination. Moloch's "name is the Mind" because Moloch is a state of mind, not an objective reality; if we changed our minds, collectively, he would vanish. (But Moloch's name is the mind also because, in Moloch, we believe that the mind is separate from, and better than, the body—"a consciousness without a body").

Blake's names for the true giant form of our collective humanity are Albion and Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus symbolize—among other things—our surrender of our imaginative selves to institutions, and our eventual recovery of them. Ginsberg is nowhere more Blakean than in the gradual predominance of Christian symbolism as *Howl* moves toward its close. Carl Solomon's mental agony becomes a "pilgrimage to a cross in the void"; and the hospital—as the representative of Moloch, of the idea of society as above the individual—becomes the "superhuman tomb" from which the "living human Jesus" must be resurrected. But the Jesus to be resurrected is collective and not merely individual; the "United States," as a body of human beings, is not Moloch but a beloved invalid to whom Solomon and Ginsberg—all the heroes of the poem—extend a self-sacrificing love, as Blake's Los, the figure of the artist, does to Albion:

I'm with you in Rockland
where we hug and kiss the United States under
our bedsheets the United States that coughs all
night and won't let us sleep
I'm with you in Rockland
where we wake up electrified out of the coma
by our own souls' airplanes roaring over the
roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the
hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls
collapse O skinny legions run outside
O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal
war is here O victory forget your underwear
we're free

"Eternal war" is Blake's term for the inward Apocalypse, the violence of full awareness, in which all fictitious "realities" are reabsorbed into the human powers that originally created them. The eternal terms correct the earthly parodies: bombing raid and shock treatment both become images of Enlightenment. But it is part of the honesty of the poem that it does not end on this note, but on an acknowledgment that no such Apocalypse has occurred; nor are Ginsberg and Solomon united except in dreams, where Solomon arrives "dripping from a sea journey on the highway across America in tears"—a figure of lost wholeness, like the drowned Phoenician sailor in *The Waste Land*.

Ginsberg began his career with a significant addition to the line of

American long poems – besides Eliot's, one thinks of *Leaves of Grass, The Bridge, Paterson* – in which a suffering individual at once reaches out to, instructs, and excoriates the collectivity he believes could heal him, in the act of healing itself. Perhaps it is not surprising that Ginsberg had little new to say about public matters thereafter. *Collected Poems* ends with a particularly dispiriting piece of doggerel called "Capitol Air":

> Truth may be hard to find but Falsehood's easy
> Read between the lines our Imperialism is sleazy
> But if you think the People's State is your Heart's Desire
> Jump right back in the frying pan from the fire

Almost exactly in the middle – chronologically, and in terms of poetic merit – falls the celebrated Vietnam poem "Wichita Vortex Sutra." The white magic ("I here declare the end of the War!") and the reductive sexual interpretations of American leaders are a disappointment after the Gnostic tensions of *Howl.* Yet the sheer accumulation of Midwestern detail draws a complex connection between the America Ginsberg, Melville, and Whitman have loved – its distances, its loneliness, its rash confidence – and the terrible abstraction of war:

> Here's Marysville –
> a black railroad engine in the children's park,
> at rest –
> and the Track Crossing
> with Cotton Belt flatcars
> carrying autos west from Dallas
> Delaware & Hudson gondolas filled with power stuff –
> a line of boxcars far east as the eye can see
> carrying battle goods to cross the Rockies
> into the hands of rich longshoremen loading
> ships on the Pacific –
> Oakland Army terminal lights
> blue illumined all night now –

After so much love, Ginsberg can never quite fall back into the hectoring, self-righteous tone that afflicts the anti-war poems of Duncan, Bly, Levertov, and Merwin. Rather, his poem reminds me of the greatest of Vietnam poems, Robert Lowell's "Waking Early Sunday Morning," with the complex connections it draws between Lowell's own mania, suburban American restlessness, and Lyndon Johnson's crusade.

Once the sterile distinctions of "academic" and "anti-academic" are set aside, Lowell is the contemporary with whom it makes most sense to compare Ginsberg, for scope and intensity. Both brought a hitherto forbidden intimacy, of madness and family secrets, into poetry. Both built their mature styles around William Carlos Williams' "No ideas but in things," though both began with the wish to be lofty iambic poet-prophets,

in the line of Blake and Hart Crane. Both *were* poet-prophets, treating all politics as psycho-politics, and regarding their knowledge of the undersides of their own characters as a powerful weapon against the false dignity and "objectivity" of official America. Between them, they define the intellectual and moral achievement of the 1960's more completely than any other two writers. Lowell's more perfectionist aesthetic enabled him to write more great poems, after the initial burst of youthful self-discovery, than Ginsberg has. But a more interesting difference (though hardly a matter for positive or negative evaluation) lies in the tone, the sensibility, with which they approach intimate personal experience. Lowell is a deeply Protestant writer. His attitude toward himself (clearer in *Day by Day* than in the more distanced, novelistic *Life Studies*) moves from a terribly harsh self-judgment, through a stab at self-forgiveness through humor, to that indefinable releasing calm – that surrender of the self to general fate – that runs through Northern European mystics from Boehme to Jung. In a late poem, he writes to his son:

> Past fifty, we learn with surprise and a sense
> of suicidal absolution
> that what we intended and failed
> could never have happened –
> and must be done better.

Ginsberg's tone, by contrast, is a traditionally Jewish one. His darkest emotion is not self-hatred, but a grief as boundless as the possibilities of exile in this world. In one of his late poems, he pictures his father's funeral:

> in B'Nai Israel Cemetery behind a green painted iron fence
> where there used to be a paint factory and farms
> where Pennick makes chemicals now
> under the Penn Central power Station
> transformers & wires, at the borderline
> between Elizabeth and Newark, next to Aunt Rose
> Gaidemack, near Uncle Harry Meltzer
> one grave over from Abe's wife Anna my father'll be buried

(Even the line-break "Aunt Rose / Gaidemack" is an exile: Ginsberg trusts us to remember a poignant early poem of his called simply "Aunt Rose" – and then to laugh at the ungainly German-Jewish last name.) Humor doesn't solve anything; but for Ginsberg, more than for Lowell, it is humor, not vision or mere endurance, that keeps one going, moment to moment to moment:

> What's to be done about Death?
> Nothing, nothing
> Stop going to school No. 6 Paterson, N.J., in 1937?
> Freeze time tonight, with a headache, at quarter to
> 2 A.M.?

This voice remains powerful and fertile in Ginsberg's work longer than the visionary or public voice, so that one can read the two poems called "Don't Grow Old," or " 'Drive All Blames into One,' " with a rueful pleasure one doesn't get from "Capitol Air." (Here again there is a parallel with Lowell, who never quite repeated the achievement of "Waking Early Sunday Morning," but went beyond his own earlier personal poetry in the strange tonalities of *The Dolphin* and *Day by Day*.)

But I feel I have oversimplified Ginsberg's sensibility a little, and must conclude by correcting this, in order to do justice to his greatest personal and religious poem, *Kaddish*. Ginsberg is a Buddhist as well as a Jew, and for a Buddhist loss is always in some sense to be welcomed—it foreshadows release from the Wheel of Illusion. It is when one feels the two impulses pulling against each other—the Jewish suspicion of reassurances beyond the bounds of this life, the Buddhist intuition that if one accepts nothingness it will reveal an other face of incommunicable radiance—that Ginsberg's mystical discourse acquires a dignity, and a searching, qualifying exactness, quite free of the (inimitable and wonderful) self-parodying elements of *Howl*. One hears this in "My Sad Self," and in the glorious opening movement of *Kaddish*:

> No more to say, and nothing to weep for but the
> Beings in the Dream, trapped in its disappearance,
> sighing, screaming with it, buying and selling pieces
> of phantom, worshipping each other,
> worshipping the God included in it all—longing or
> inevitability?—while it lasts, a Vision—anything
> more?
> It leaps about me, as I go out and walk the street,
> look back over my shoulder, Seventh Avenue, the
> battlements of window office buildings shouldering
> each other high, under a cloud, tall as the sky
> an instant—and the sky above—an old blue place.
> or down the Avenue to the south, to—as I walk toward
> the Lower East Side—where you walked 50 years ago,
> little girl—from Russia, eating the first poisonous
> tomatoes of American—frightened on the dock—
> then struggling in the crowds of Orchard Street toward
> what?—toward Newark—
> toward candy store, first home-made sodas of the century,
> hand-churned ice cream in backroom on musty brownfloor
> boards—
> Toward education marriage nervous breakdown, operation,
> teaching school, and learning to be mad, in a dream—
> what is this life?
> Toward the Key in the window—and the great Key lays its
> head of light on top of Manhattan, and over the floor,

and lays down on the sidewalk – in a single vast beam,
moving, as I walk down First toward the Yiddish
Theater – and the place of poverty
you knew, and I know, but without caring now – Strange
to have moved thru Paterson, and the West, and
Europe and here again,
with the cries of Spaniards now in the doorstoops doors
and dark boys on the street, fire escapes old as you
– Tho you're not old now, that's left here with me –
Myself, anyhow, maybe as old as the universe – and
I guess that dies with us – enough to cancel all
that comes – What came is gone forever every time –
That's good! That leaves it open for no regret – no
fear radiators, lacklove, torture even toothache
in the end –
Though while it comes it is a lion that eats the soul –
and the lamb, the soul, in us, alas, offering itself
in sacrifice to change's fierce hunger –

This is disarmingly simple, and at the same time masterly, in the way the heartbreakingly speeded-up announcement of the poem's argument – the life and disintegration of Naomi Ginsberg – weaves into and out of the speculations on the value of life itself, and the wry musings ("Tho you're not old now, that's left here with me") build to the Biblical moment of the surrender to the lion. One could point out incidental beauties ("brownfloor boards" instead of "brown floorboards," or the way the "great Key" of sunlight, just before it might become portentous, metamorphoses into the spotlight of the Yiddish Theater, the local specifics of illusion). But mainly, this is like one of those passages in Whitman or late Williams that feel so unaffectedly serious and personal that anything could be said, and everything would fall out right. Even *Kaddish* does not remain at this level throughout: two pages later, we get this weird mixture of genuine magic and pseudo-Dylan Thomas: "Magnificent, mourned no more, marred of heart, mind behind, married dreamed, mortal changed – Ass and face done with murder." In a way the whole of the poet is in that line: the cult of spontaneity that leads him to leave in overly literary, as well as overly drab, first thoughts; and then, in the last six words, the greatness – the quality of the utterly unexpected – that makes him, with all his faults, the Whitman or Williams of our day.

ALAN WILLIAMSON

AT THE WESTERN GATES
Nathaniel Tarn, Santa Fe: Tooth of Time Books, 1985
THE DESERT MOTHERS
Nathaniel Tarn, Grenada, Mississippi: Salt-Works Press, 1984

It is a commonplace of the large, historical view of poetry that individual poets in this century have been compelled to discover or create a world-picture to replace the inexorably eroded and ultimately lost image of the world and everything in it commonly held in the past. After the affront to our cosmic narcissism wrought by the revolutions initiated by Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud in the way we think about the universe and our place in it, poets, like their philosophical and scientific analogues, have tried to apprehend and reinstate some principle that makes it all hang together, to discover in some form or other what Karl Jaspers called "the Grand Reason" by which to save ourselves and our art. We have learned to accept this dimension of every worthwhile poet's enterprise, this need to find a great design and an individual place in it as a condition of artistic productivity. The convention of the invocation has almost disappeared, but the need to begin a poem with some assurance it is attachable to a coherence prior to and greater than itself abides.

That the poems of Nathaniel Tarn since early in his career have been directed towards an awareness of a greater world is attested by the work itself as well as by his own observation that "you really do form a world-model, a cosmic model, for yourself, which then localize or universalize according to your need" ("An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn," *Boundary 2*, IV, 1975, 6). Tarn's ability to combine his emotional intensity and notable intellectual breadth – he is a man for whom learning is meant to serve the special knowing of art – gives his poems their singular immediacy and reference. The urgency with which he begins the record of one of his wide-ranging interests or experiences fuels the movement outward to ends that exceed and subsume the personal reflexiveness that provides a starting-point. This can be nicely illustrated by a small, mid-career book of twenty love poems with the telling title *The Microcosm* (Milwaukee: Membrane Press, 1977). Characterized by a delicacy and directness of statement to the beloved that is laced with geographic and mythological allusions, the lyrics progress as if drawn by a gravitational force to a perception of their love that acknowledges the earth and universe as its only meaningful setting. By the closing lines of the final and title poem of the book, the love has been subtly reduced to a term in a simile but its value appreciated by its metaphorical integration into a vision of the planet and galaxy:

> between tree fingers
> a telescope achieves the sky
> quietly like a confident husband

and at the climax of the firmament
ringed with a crown from another sphere
Saturn alone is spinning on itself

in the wavering summer light

The Microcosm reveals an important, if not primary, way in which Tarn the poet thinks. *At the Western Gates*, with its double suggestion of heading for a new entrance and an exit, is a more complex continuation and fulfillment of this impulse to compose poems that fit and form recognitions of a macrocosm. He strives for an epic vision through a variety of mainly lyric sequences that pull together, in every sense you can think of, to achieve it. While no one poem, Shield of Achilles-like, unfolds a full cosmic vision, the entire book, with its five divisions that treat specific yet overlapping matters, yields a great though necessarily only partially completed image of an order. These matters, to which veteran readers of Tarn are accustomed, derive from his manifold experiences as anthropologist, archaeologist, comparatist, linguist, naturalist and explain the plenitude of vivid detail in the earth, air, and waters of his world. As the last poem of the first section, "Journal of the Laguna de San Ignacio," neatly shows, the learning and experience are contained and controlled by an artist with a vision and an ear for verbal intricacy and balance.

"Perhaps it is not the sea
we have witnessed
raising these whales
to the power of air
and downing them again to depths
unheard of in the history of water—
perhaps it is the sky,
even paradise,
and these are the heavenly animals
with wings of wind and music
who have laid their image
on all earthly souls
(since nothing is forgotten.)"
Father, the gate is open
he declared on landing.
Wrote on that desk
and in that book they say
that was the oldest in the library
within the belly of the whale:
"these are the animals
the ancient men,
blind leading blind,
in the old days, on the old ships

with perfumed masts,
hearing the music of the sirens
thought to be angels . . ."
(p. 14)

The whale-watching theme, which is dominant in this section and major throughout the volume, presents the discovery of what may always have been the true microcosm, and *homo*, if no longer *microcosmus*, has been raised to a new level of *fabricator*, finding himself through and in his work.

"Another sorrow.
One more defeat.
Another death.
The sea's outside,
distant waves
breathe in all sounds.
Suddenly I meet the beauty of my poems
whom I had never seen bridal before.
I live with them as man and wife
outmarried by death only.
There is no other house"
(p. 22)

Always a powerful presence in his work, the beloved is introduced early in the book and gives us a moment of special humor when the poet posits the need for the other marriage through and in which a man finds himself.

Vagaries of the sea life.
My bunk is so short
I need to lose head or feet
and its sky is so low
I have to be fitted into it
like a dime into a slot machine.
If you come into the cabin
you break my back,
if I come in, I break yours.
We have bruised elbows.
Nowhere to sit and read,
the lights don't work.
Water floods in the basin.
And how the hell we get to fuck in here
is any circus animal's guess
(p. 6)

With the deceptive ease of its amusing contrast between the severely constricted cabin space for human fucking (man and woman, circus animals themselves, will no doubt find a way) and the unbounded eros-in-the-sea enjoyed by the whales, the poem still establishes a place for the lovers

in the larger scheme of things. This lovers' place is explored with poignancy in part five, "North Rim," where the poet muses on and observes his beloved in poems that also chart a course through the Bering Sea to Japan's Hokkaido. This northern, exotic setting is remarkably evoked by a number of the poems in this part of the book, but its heart ("But the whole of creation is in question," p. 25) lies in the middle section, "Jonah's Saddle," in the compact between the song of nature and the poet's own coincident nature to sing it – "The world has voice in us, we are the crust of its imagination" (*Atitlan/Alashka*, Boulder: Brillig Works, 1975, p. 155).

SIX

What is NOT song?
What will dare
        NOT become song?
Will grass
        refuse to become song?
Will flowers?
                Will fiish
not become song
making a speech in poetry?
(leave us *one* song to ourselves
        they might say
and give us all *your* poetry!)
Will the animals
        not become song?
What will pack-rat do,
red rattlesnake,
fox on the desert's edges;
will they refuse to become song?
  And what will deer do –
will they shy away from song
        and hide among thickets
on the other side of the lagoon?
                And the whale,
as long as the wall of China,
        will the whale herself
not become song?
                (p. 28)

It is this unity, the knowledge of its possibility, that enables the poet and those that follow him through the poem/song finally to enter "the order of ideal time." The sense of Dantean stasis, of rest, achieved at the end of Tarn's journey conveys the experience of being admitted to that order,

Rain swallow,
    ama tsubame,

busy time's scythe
    but far faster
slices the air
    above Teuri:
        black knife
through a grey rainbow
made of delicate cloud.
At the busy hour of birds
        all of a sudden
life is tolerable again,
the birds hone to sharpness
        our remembering
that we have never travelled before,
        will not travel again,
are not travelling now.
                (p. 68)

and depends on the cumulative effect of all of the poems that precede it for the measure and substance of its simply stated grandeur. It has been particularly prepared for by the poem "Palenque," in which Tarn pays tribute to one of his culture heroes, Denis Puleston, who asked "Let the order of ideal time/ be asserted and let me/ be at the center in the/ fire which is still/ and does not consume" (p. 31).

The poems in *The Desert Mothers*, on the other hand, are unified in their emphasis on Tarn's citizenship in the community of poets and artistic innovators. Like "Palenque," many of the poems in *The Desert Mothers* spring from the poet's profound interest and involvement in the lives and work of others. Whether meditating on flight (that "dreampath") and taking off from an epigraph from Hölderlin, mourning the life and death while honoring and defining the work of German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, transferring the questing Peredur, the medieval Welsh version of the grail seeking Perceval, into a modern, southwestern setting, assaulting the polluters of our water and politics, and responding to the inspiration he has found in the works of friends, these poems are linked by the deep concern and stubborn hope for the failing city of man. Their ultimate effect is to nurture rather than to put down or mock. They are the stands taken by the "desert mothers" of the desolate city against despair, just as their desert forefathers withstood a different manifestation of the dark-voiced negator. Tarn has for some time recognized and tapped his own feminine/maternal sources. "We have been/ from band to band of the desert/ and the woman inside me/ is alone speaking," he writes in one of the poems in *At the Western Gates* (p. 23). This voice is heard in both books and draws upon, is attuned to, the saving song of nature. But Tarn will not fall into the trap he himself was warned against: "Speaking for nature so vociferously that all relevance to the present, despairing city is virtually excluded" ("Fresh Frozen Fenix," *New*

Literary History, XVI, 1985, 425). The end is not just communion with nature for one, the end is to revive the human community with its *dynamis*. How *At the Western Gates* and *The Desert Mothers* complement each other may be shown in a number of ways, but none better than this:

PEREDUR WEST

Smell of the desert
before the sun eliminates all shadows:
the rider who would not write us down
as if we had not lived
  breathes it in completely
    entering the canyon
his lungs awash with childhood perfumes.
  Westwards he moves, his right hand held
  by the invisible daughter of the earth.
Motherwards he moves, back to his homeland,
the lady leading him has promised it:
  he grants her trust implicitly.
  Recites the names of the first landowners
  bringing a map to life that had been lost
  since the disaster he alone survived.
            She leads him to a fountain
in the canyon's heart
  which they had tried to quench in the old days
but the fountain sang a wound
  and never could be quenched.
    Star of the Desert, he begins to sing,
    Rose of Sand,
    here I stand at my father's fountain
    and you have left it utterly,
    waters that once sang joyously
    drowning the reason for all tears
    have turned to sand and bones are now
    all my solace day or night.
It is here he begins to write us down,
  here he takes off his leathers
and is dressed in armor like the sun.
Facing the mesas jagged like a saw
with teeth fit for a giant's grinding jaw,
  he now moves further west.
Even so, travel helps the weary poet
  moving a song back to his heart.
Brighter than a thousand suns,
  his father shines against his breastplate,
strikes from his lance
  a thousand shards of light.
    His eyes are put out now,

he writes by touch,
  guiding the quill with his free hand.
Blind I return to my father's land,
  blind, I accept my mother's curdled milk,
blind, I shall write us down with our last ashes.
Poverty, he says, as he enters the mesas,
naming them for the gift he has gotten of God.

GEORGE ECONOMOU

"There is no first or last discourse, and dialogical context knows no limits (it disappears into an unlimited past and in our unlimited future). Even *past* meanings, that is those that have arisen in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (completed once and for all, finished), they will always change (renewing themselves) in the course of the dialogue's subsequent development, and yet to come. At every moment of the dialogue, there are immense and unlimited masses of forgotten meanings, but, in some subsequent moments, as the dialogue moves forward they will return to memory and live in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will celebrate its rebirth. The problem of the great *temporality*."

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(1974)

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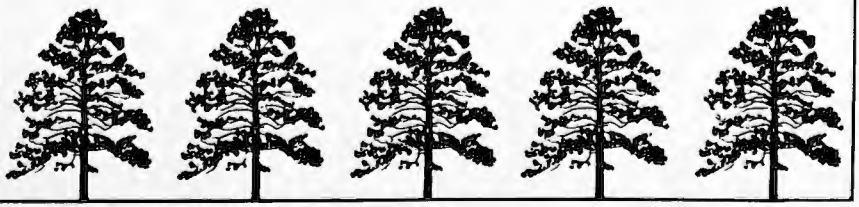

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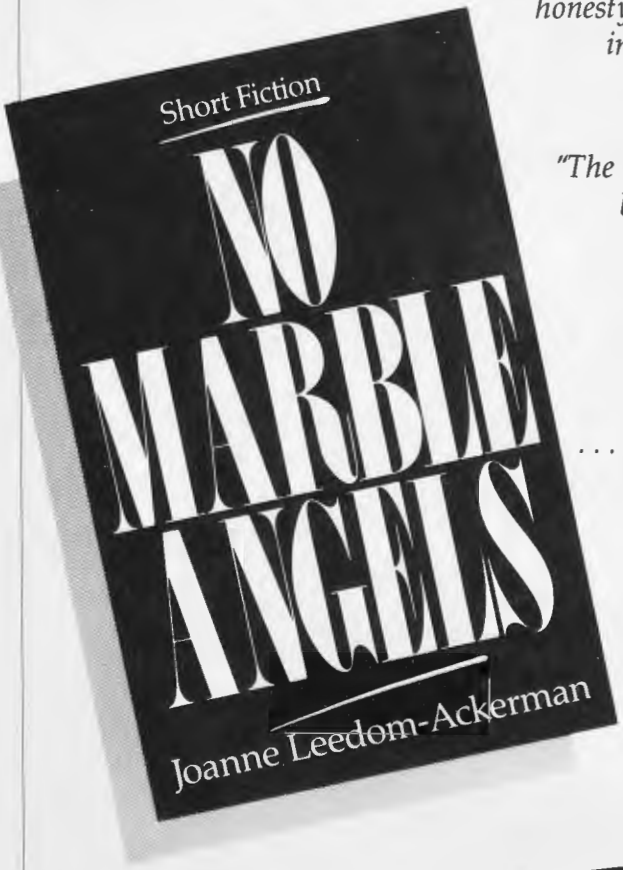

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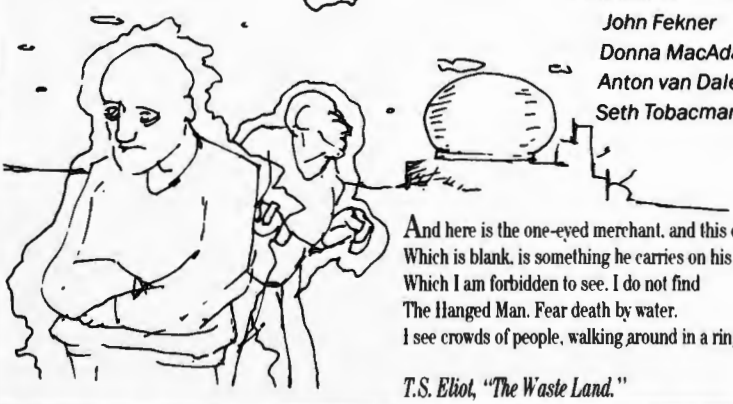

And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back.
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking around in a ring.

T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land."

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